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62nd year of publication

Mugabe intensifies his reign of terror

Harry der Nederlanden

In a rather macabre irony the food summit meeting in Rome saw Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe's dictator address the meeting on the food crisis. Mugabe managed to transform his country from being the breadbasket of Africa to a country in which the majority of the people depend on food aid. Some one-third of the population receives food aid and almost half are suffering from malnutrition.

Although the European Union imposed a travel ban on Mugabe, he was able to participate in the Rome conference because he was traveling under the protection of the UN, which takes precedence over any EU sanctions. At the food conference Mugabe blamed the plight of his people on Western sanctions, but the sanctions consist for the most part of travel restrictions on him and his cronies. The UN has done very little to rein in the regime's excesses and abuses.

Since Mugabe's land grab in January of 2000, in which 4,000 white farms were seized, farm production has declined further every year. Over the last eight years agricultural production has fallen by 80 percent. The farms were handed over to so-called "war veterans" (those who fought with Mugabe during the struggle for independence), but these lacked the skills to operate the farms, and most of them have become unproductive. Now, instead of exporting food grains, Zimbabwe is heavily dependent on continuous infusions of food aid. Conditions would be even worse if millions of Zimbabweans had not fled the country in search of food and jobs in neighboring countries like South Africa.

As Mugabe systematically destroyed his country's economy



and undermined democratic freedoms, most of Africa has simply looked on, uttering little public criticism of the dictator. The South African Development Community has urged Mugabe to conduct fair elections and then went on to declare elections fair that were patently unfair. President Thabo Mbeki has long been close to Mugabe, but his visits have produced no results; in fact until very recently Mbeki refused to express any criticisms of his policies, even though they have created big problems and tensions in South Africa. Many of the foreigners attacked in the slums of various South African cities come from Zimbabwe.

After a period of relative calm following the elections, which Mugabe lost by a small margin, making a run-off necessary, the army and his gangs of thugs have stepped up pressure to intimidate the opposition in the lead-up to the run-off polls. Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change, was twice hauled off by the police as he made his way to political rallies. To show that he was not to be intimidated by Western powers, Mugabe even detained a couple of US diplomats who were in the country on a fact-finding mission. Two prominent journalists from the US and the UK were arrested and imprisoned

for four days.

Even more ominously, Mugabe ordered CARE, one of the largest NGOs providing food aid in the country to leave. He charged that they were helping the opposition to organize against him.

Human Rights Watch has documented 36 deaths and over 2000 brutal beatings of MDC supporters by police, army and Mugabe's thugs. According to some analysts, the army may

be as much behind the violence and intimidation as Mugabe, as it fears that an MDC victory would threaten its privileged position in Zimbabwe.

Joshua Hammer, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, describes a vicious campaign designed to terrorize those living in rural areas of Zimbabwe. Soldiers, police, war veterans and youth militia, he says have been deployed to intimidate voters swinging to the opposition through beatings, burning of homes, public

humiliation and even killings. Thousands of teachers have fled or were burnt out because in the past election they served as observers at the polls in an attempt to keep the elections honest.

Even if observers are now admitted to the country to monitor the upcoming run-off, critics say, in many areas the people are so frightened that they will not show up to vote. There is little or no chance that the election scheduled for June 27 will be fair.

A reporter returns to Iraq - and finds guarded optimism

Howard LaFranchi

Baghdad - Walid Nahem sits at a small iron table with his nephew Haidar Karim, green grass under their feet, before them an expansive view of the fabled Tigris River silently wending its way through the Iraqi capital.

It's still light enough to read Haidar's ninth-grade English lesson book, opened to a chapter on letter writing. But the heat and glare of Baghdad's daytime sun are gone, leaving a diffused light that puts the date palms and low-slung buildings on the opposite bank in impressionistic relief, while taking the edge off the concrete walls and bomb-scarred buildings also in view.

It is this preferred time of day that has brought Mr. Nahem and Haidar

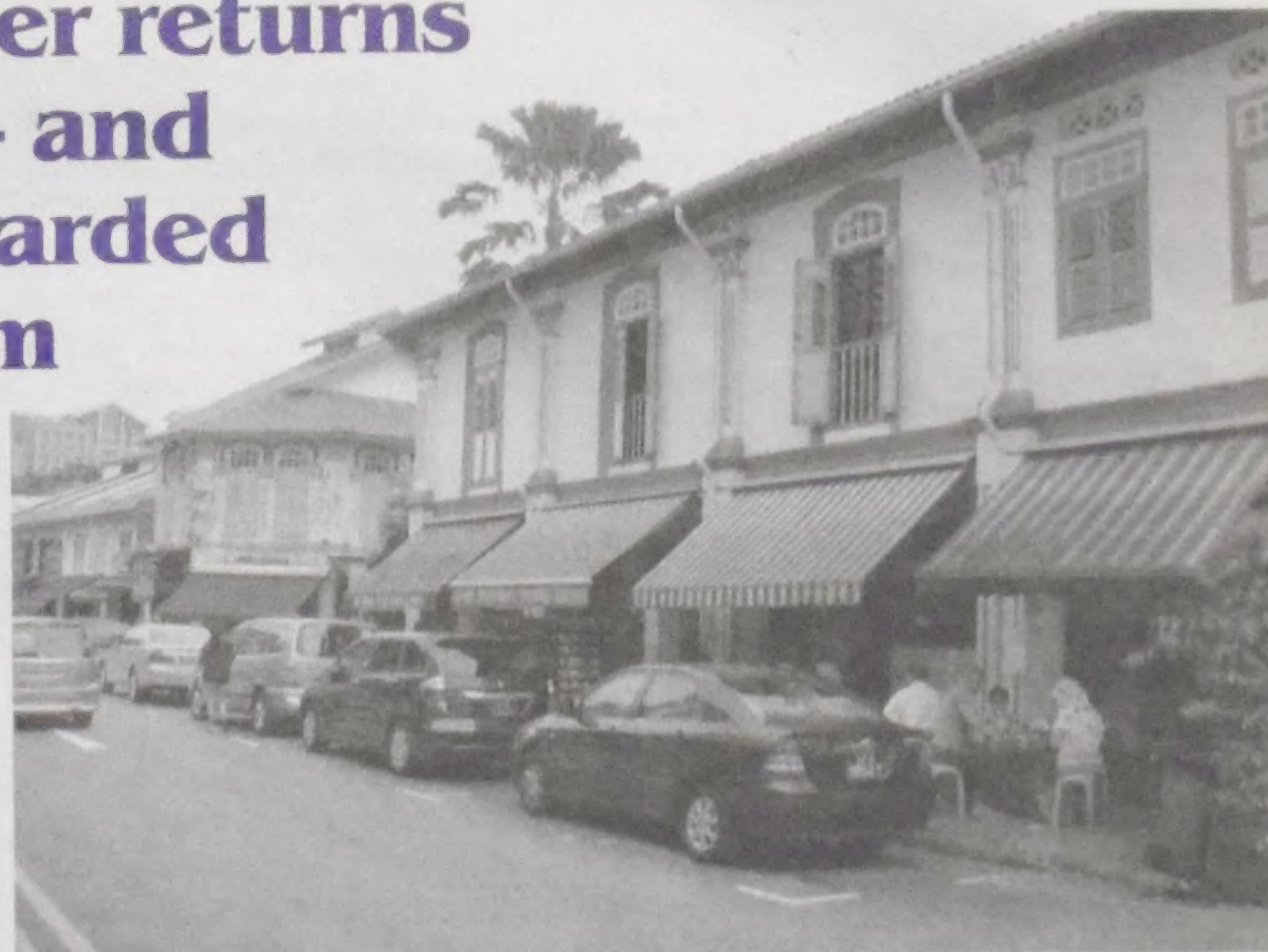
out to Abu Nawas Park, a newly reopened and refurbished stretch of riverfront greenery, flower beds, playgrounds, and soccer fields.

"Taking your lesson books outside to the fresh air is like a tradition in Iraq, and now we feel that, at least in this place, it is safe and possible to do this again," says Nahem, a security guard. As families stroll and children squeal at swings and slides, Nahem says this tentative return to old ways

is cause for cautious optimism. "God willing, it means all Iraq is getting better, that security is coming back," he says. "I think there's a chance this can be true."

Lingering outside the ice-cream shop

For a reporter last here a year ago, during perhaps the deepest of Iraq's despair, there is a palpable change: See Iraq on page 2



News

Iraq... continued from page 1

visible in such mundane things as sidewalk rebuilding projects and people lingering outside a favorite ice-cream shop, audible in the tone of families returning to neighborhoods they'd fled in fear.

Iraq is a different place now: The grip of horrendous daily violence has loosened; the government is showing some signs of being one. And Iraqis – once among the best educated, best fed, and most widely traveled people in the region, practitioners of a river- and desert-fashioned joy of living – dare to hope.

"Here we can taste again the flavor of life," says Rawaa Fadhel, on his second visit in as many weeks to Abu Nawas Park with his fiancée. "For three or four years, we have stayed in our houses and lived with this pressure," says the employee of a Pepsi bottling plant. "When I go back to my neighborhood, I will feel like my hands are tied again. But six months ago, we didn't even have this," he says of the park, "so it's a sign of progress."

Over the past month, I covered Iraq's stories. Some – like Sadr City's turmoil, a spike in US military deaths, and Iran's growing influence – were variations on ones I'd covered since first coming here after the 2003 invasion. Others – a look at one of Baghdad's new walled neighborhoods, Iraqi impressions of the huge US Embassy about to open here, or questions about the capabilities of Iraq's half-million-strong security forces – more emblematic of this year.

But in many of these stories, common themes emerged: a tentative sense of better security, relief over an improved economy, and manifestations of the cogs of bureaucracy starting to turn again.

New this year, I found, was a widespread assumption of rampant government corruption. That was fed by a general knowledge of the windfall the government is reaping from soaring oil prices, coupled with an impatience for government services to improve faster. A recurring explanation for everything from a continuing electricity shortage to lack of parliamentary action on long-awaited oil-revenue legislation was a silent gesture of a hand first raised so the fingers could make the universal sign of money and then slipped into a pocket.

As one man in Saidiyah told me, "The struggles now are a little less about guns and more about power and money. But as these struggles go on, politics has stopped." Positioning for the fall's provincial elections appears to have taken precedence over national reconciliation.

Yet while little political progress has been made, the government has advanced its sovereignty over areas it did not control a year ago. This started in late March, as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki hastily launched an offensive targeting Shiite militias in the southern city of Basra – apparently with little warning to the Americans. The poorly planned offensive



Sadr City

exposed Iran's heavy influence in Iraq, after the Iranians helped broker a cease-fire.

Still, it is seen as a triumph for Mr. Maliki. Basra, a port city known for a strong cultural heritage and a joyful, open-air lifestyle, is living again after having fallen increasingly under the yoke of Shiite extremists.

In Baghdad's Sadr City, many residents told me they hoped that they, too, could be freed from the grip of the Mahdi Army, the militia loyal to the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. By the time of my recent departure from Baghdad, the Iraqi Army was moving in, without a fight, to parts of Sadr City it had never controlled.

Love-hate view of US forces

Still strong this year were signs of an enduring love-hate relationship with the US military presence. Justified or not, people still fear that, without the Americans, whatever has come together will fall apart. But some Iraqis said the Americans were enabling a do-nothing tendency in the government, while others said there would be no sovereign Iraq with the Americans, still more than 130,000 strong, appearing to run the show.

I had heard it in 2003 from a Shiite woman selling some of her prized wedding jewelry in Baghdad's old Shiite Khadimiyah neighborhood. "Yes, the Americans should leave, just not yet," she said. I heard the same sentiment now, in the much newer and mixed neighborhood of Saidiyah. Residents, who had lived through daily killings at the height of sectarian violence last year, feared that the progress they were seeing would vanish if the American soldiers camped in their midst picked up and left.

An artist sees gains

Despite such worries, the sense of budding progress is broadly based. Artist Qasim Sabti is one Iraqi who exemplifies this still-fragile optimism. His speech is peppered with references to a ruined country, and his artwork depicts the desert landscapes of his youth now torn by barriers, concrete blast walls, and rifle shot.

But he has a stack of files on his desk that tells him things are changing. "For the first time in five years, we have a government that is putting up some money so our young artists don't have to either starve or leave," he says. At his Hewan Gallery, which never closed amid the violence, he recently organized an exhibit of 85 female artists.

As president of the Iraqi Council of the Arts, Mr. Sabti reviews the applications of artists seeking government stipends. "It won't be much money," he says, "but at least it's something that

says there is a government that is remembering the cultural dimension of a country's life."

Over five weeks, I witnessed sometimes-amusing signs of a changing Iraq. As I stood in the security-check line to enter the Iraqi parliament building in Baghdad's fortified Green Zone, I watched a US soldier undergo a full search and even be asked to remove his body armor – much to the amusement of the Iraqis in line. Just a few years ago, it was US soldiers who controlled this same building, and Iraqis who entered under great suspicion.

Then there was the scene at the gates of Prime Minister Maliki's residence, in a lush corner of the Green Zone called "little Venice" for its meandering waterways.

American journalists had been lured by the promise of a meeting with Maliki, US Gen. David Petraeus, and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker. But only after more than two hours of waiting did a Maliki press aide inform the throng that there would be no questions, only a statement by Maliki announcing Iraq's purchase of Boeing aircraft to relaunch the moribund Iraqi Airways.

The journalists decided to leave. As they walked away, an American soldier standing at the gates fretted aloud about what his boss, General Petraeus, would say. "He's not gonna be too happy about this," he said, shaking his head. "He was pretty adamant about having press here."

At another time, the show would have been run the way the American general wanted, but now the Iraqis were letting it be known they were in charge.

Perhaps none of the Iraqis I met exemplified the mix of progress and inertia so well as my friends Ali and George. A Shiite Muslim and a Christian, respectively, Ali and George are two young men I first met in 2004 when I wandered into their photo and computer repair shop in Baghdad, my malfunctioning camera in hand.

Ali fixed the camera, and we became friends, their everyday experiences – bombs on the street, death threats for taking a work contract with the American military, friends fleeing the country as refugees, George's Christian community dwindling from year to year – a barometer for me of how Iraq was doing.

Last year had been a low point. At the last minute, my two friends had called off a reunion we had planned for the guarded compound where the *Monitor* has its bureau. With violence raging, they had decided it was risky for them to be seen entering a compound where Americans lived. I left

Baghdad without seeing them.

A bid to reconnect with long-missed friends

This year, being able to see my old friends became a kind of personal litmus test of progress. But phone numbers I had from a year earlier didn't work, and e-mails went unanswered. I told the *Monitor's* security team that there was one visit I had to make before I left. If only for five minutes – judged the safe amount of time I could be on the street in central Baghdad – I had to go to the photo shop I'd happened into in 2004.

I felt I knew right where to go, but when I entered what I thought was the right shop, the place looked surprisingly different: The counters weren't right; the lights were brighter; a staircase was missing. I left and went to the shop next door, but it was wrong, for sure. The next was no better, and my five minutes were ticking down, my security detail getting nervous. I decided the first shop had to be the right place – perhaps my friends had sold it over the last difficult year.

When I walked in the second time, it looked no more familiar. A creeping sadness was setting in.

Then from behind a partition, a familiar figure, the same tall, hopelessly thin young man who had cheerfully repaired an American journalist's camera four years before.

"Ali," I said.

The instant smile and widened eyes, the leap over the (remodeled) counter, and warm hug told me I had found the right place. Ali whisked me to a back room where George sat hunched over a computer circuit board. "Wow, this is a fantastic surprise!" He said.

We were able to have dinner at Ali's house – an impossibility a year before.

The friends told me that after the disaster of the previous year, their shop was now doing well (so well they didn't have the time to resolve their personal e-mail problems). Iraqis seemed to have money to spend again, they said, and they were getting out more to spend it. It had been months since a car bomb or shooting had damaged the shop!

Ali and George showed little confidence in Iraq's government. Services were still terrible; Baghdad remained a dangerous and deteriorating war zone – even as much of the rest of the Middle East enjoyed an oil-fed boom, they lamented.

Each young man made the by-now familiar sign denoting corruption to explain Iraq's woes, each said that, even though things were better than the year before, they still had a sense of lost years and of life passing Iraq by.

But Ali did have a special surprise to share with me, a pure embodiment of optimism in otherwise mixed times in Baghdad: his two-month-old son Hassan.

Cradling his vigorous offspring, ruffling his shiny jet-black hair, Ali said, "My wishes for a better Iraq are now for him, I want him to have a good life."

Howard LaFranchi is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Lifestyles

Working with livestock can be very dangerous

Maynard van der Galien

Most people are aware of the dangers associated with farm machinery, but the dangers when working with livestock are less well known. Working with livestock can be very dangerous. Every livestock farmer can tell you how he or she has been injured when handling cattle.

Last week one of my docile beef cows took after me when I got too close to her new-born calf. I whacked a steel stick at her. I always carry a sturdy stick when checking cattle.

A few years ago an over-protective beef cow, who had a day-old calf, ran at me and rammed me in the thigh throwing me down. I hit her with my stick and got up over the steel gates to safety. I was checking the calf to see if it was a bull or heifer.

I use extra caution when I needle the young calves—they get two needles and an ear tag. I try to separate the calf (or calves) from the mother. That's hard to do when calves are born in the pasture field. I try corner the calf using a tractor and loader or the ATV. Sometimes they have to be brought to the barn.

Holstein bulls are probably the most unpredictable and dangerous of all the cattle breeds. In recent years, there have been at least eight incidents in eastern Ontario where Holstein bulls roughed up farmers. The farmers were seriously injured. Three farmers were killed.

One 66-year-old farm worker was moving cows in with a three-year-old 2,000-pound bull when the bull attacked, breaking the man's neck and killing him. The man had worked on farms all his life.

A one-ton Holstein bull roughed up a dairy farmer when the farmer was attempting to move the bull from one group of cows to another group. The bull tossed the 40-year-old man around like a toy. If the man's elderly father hadn't been close by he would have been crushed to death. The man had massive bruises and spent several days in hospital.

The bull had never shown aggressive behavior and the elderly man guessed it was provoked by the humid weather, late feeding, the red shirt his son was wearing, or he just felt playful. Wearing a red shirt when trying to move an unpredictable, stubborn bull is not a bright idea.

Dairy farmers do not always use common sense when dealing with Holstein bulls. There was an incident some years ago that had me wondering how stupid farmers can be. A father and son were leading a Holstein bull from a field of Holstein heifers and were going to put the bull in with Holstein cows. They were taking the bull and walking him away from his female companions.

The bull charged the elderly farmer and tossed him over the electric fence and attempted to crush his chest. The son grabbed a steel fence rod and smacked the beast across the face with the steel rod. That action saved the elderly man and the son got a Governor General's Award for Bravery.

Both farmers should have gotten an award for bravery—bravery for walking a Holstein bull away from his "girls" as if he were a 4-H calf.

The rule of thumb, when moving a bull from one group

of cows or heifers, is that you never move a bull by himself. Never! You move him with a few cows or heifers into a holding pen or holding area. Then you trick the bull by moving the females out and you bring in some of his new companions and move them out together.

One spring, I wanted to move my quiet Red Angus bull from a barn full of heifers to the beef cows in the yard. He had spent all winter with the heifers. I had the bull separated from the heifers and opened the gate and I thought the bull would just walk out the gate. The bull wasn't going to go out the gate alone and kept looking back over to the heifers. I wasn't going in behind him with a stick and shoo him out as I do with cows, calves, heifers or steers.

I could have put a few heifers in with the bull and they would have walked out, but then I'd have to try to separate them again in the holding area by opening and quickly closing gates. It also meant I would have to go in and take some risk—not so much with the bull but with the frisky heifers. So to play it safe I brought in the loader tractor that I use for cleaning the barn and cornered the bull so he had to go out the gate. He put his big head on the loader bucket and pushed, but soon gave up and walked out the gate.

Don't take any chances is a good rule of thumb when dealing with bulls.

Maynard runs 45 beef cows and first calf heifers that calve from May to September. He keeps a Red Angus and Charolais bull. Both are quiet easy calving bulls. No calving difficulties in recent years. That's a big plus.



Do granite countertops mask our emptiness?

Jennifer Moses

Baton Rouge, LA. — Like tens of thousands of other Americans, my husband and I are in the rather uncomfortable position of owning two houses. And not because we have a weekend house, either. Rather, my husband took a new job and we're moving—specifically from Baton Rouge, La., to Montclair, N.J.—and though our home in Baton Rouge is historic, old, and airy, with a perennially blooming flower garden and two giant live oak trees out back, 80-year-old wooden floors, and high ceilings and two staircases and an enormous eat-in kitchen, it hasn't sold.

Our real estate agent tells us that the problem is two-fold. First, the bathrooms haven't been updated since the '90s. Second, the kitchen doesn't have slate counters.

She also concedes that the economy isn't as robust as it could be—and even if it were, she says, young people want all the latest.

But, really, do counters matter that much to people? Could this obsession with home improvement represent some deeper emptiness within us?

I am not, of course, unbiased in all this, as I happen to think that our Baton Rouge home is about as to-die-for as they come. But our agent is right about the kitchen and the baths. They do not sport any of the kind of up-to-date ultra-in interior accoutrements now in high demand. Things like marble countertops and glassed-in cabinets; Sub-Zero refrigerators and built-in wine coolers; "Tuscan farmhouse" distressed-wood built-ins and antiques pressed-tin ceilings and restored cast-iron claw-footed bathtubs and Tiffany-inspired wall sconces and recessed lighting and ecofriendly designer closets and natural stone toilets and kitchen drawers outfitted with built-in molded cutlery holders.

Perhaps I'm exaggerating—but not by much. Also: I myself am hardly immune to drooling over the pages of everything from *Metropolitan Home* to *Southern Living*. Even so, you have to wonder when you hear stories like the one our other broker, the one who sold us our new house in New Jersey, told us. She said that though she loves her own home, she's been too busy to make upgrades. Specifically, her kitchen lacks an "island." One of her co-workers, a woman in her early 30s, recently turned to her and gasped: "How can you live without an island? How can you even stand it?"

"They can't so much as imagine not owning all the swank

stuff," our New Jersey broker said. "What can I say?"

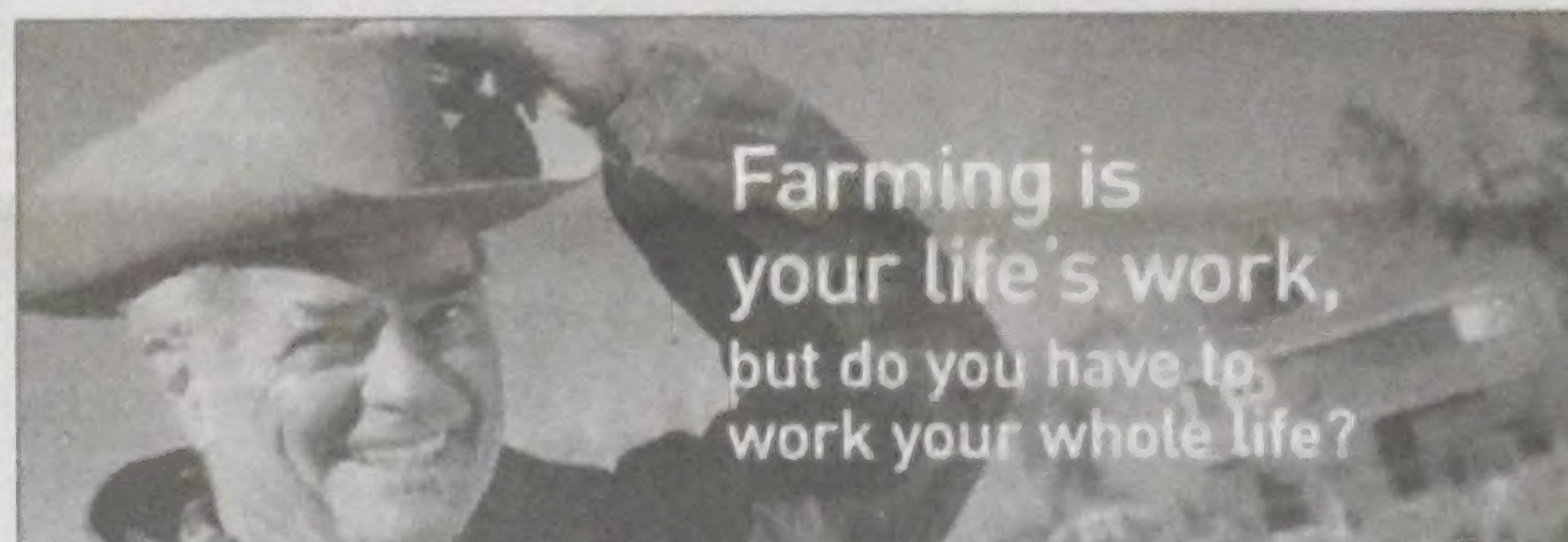
As far as I'm concerned, there's plenty to say. First, where does all the money come from? Really, it's a mystery: most people I know, at least in Baton Rouge, consider themselves fortunate if they can keep up with both their house and car payments. Second, the world is in a terrible shape—where aren't people starving to death or being shot at?—and it strikes me that just perhaps the money that we spend on, for example, all-marble entrance halls just might be better spent feeding orphans. If I'm being judgmental or moralistic, so be it. And though I embrace the idea that homemaking is a noble pursuit that can, as a bonus, be fun and creative, when it comes to interior entitlement, I have to put the following question: What gives?

My own hunch is that the current explosion in home obsession is actually a displacement from the interior life that human beings were once encouraged to live, back when people largely believed in the existence of what they called the "soul." In other words, the more we ignore our spiritual interior, the more we strive to compensate with lavish, lush home interiors. Our homes—our dwelling-places, made of brick and wood and cross-beams and poured concrete and glass and tubing and wiring and nails—are getting the love and attention, while the inner self is left to languish, suffering greater and greater emptiness, which its keepers try to plug with yet more stuff.

It doesn't work, though—I know because I've tried it.

On the other hand, they went gaga at Versailles, too—and in other nifty places as well, like Windsor Castle and the Taj Mahal, not to mention Edith Wharton's beloved home, The Mount, in the Berkshires, and the various tartered-up-to-the-max "cottages" at Newport. After a certain age, real estate—and the trimmings that go with it—is the great national aphrodisiac. It may not be love, but obsession has its rewards too.

Now if you'll excuse me, I have to decide whether to paint my new powder room pale peach or soft peach petal.



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Editorial

Are we in danger of losing the essence of office?

Harry der Nederlanden

Many of us, I'm sure, will recall stories from years ago having to do with elders and family visiting. When I was a little older, I was allowed to sit off to one side at the kitchen table to listen in on family visits. During one of those visits, two of our theologically more articulate elders disagreed about some point of doctrine. As my father and mother sat by sipping coffee, the debate raged on and on till the combatants tired of it and went home. At one point my father grinned and winked at me. Thinking back, I wondered whether he had deliberately raised a question which he knew would put them at loggerheads. Although my father was respectful of church elders, having served as one himself, he was not above such stunts.

During another visit by two elders who worked long hours outdoors, one of the elders had a tendency to drone on and on in a monotone. Slowly the head of the other elder sagged forward and settled on his chest. He was sound asleep. Before he could start snoring, my mother quickly fetched the coffee pot and asked him if he wanted a refill. It took him a few moments to orient himself and to recapture the family-visiting mode.

These are only a couple of funny incidents. There are, of course, also stories to tell that are not funny, stories in which councils caused offense and acted unwisely. We are only all too aware of the shortcomings and human-all-too-human failings of our leaders. We are perhaps even more conscious of them in ourselves, as more and more of us find an excuse not to serve as elder or deacon because we are aware of our own inadequacies.

Last Sunday our church once again ordained a number of elders and I was again struck by how the gospel prompts us to look deeper. Office bearers, our form tells us, and I believe it is firmly rooted in Scripture, have been given to the church out of God's love for his people. The Lord did not leave his followers as an aggregate of individuals each seeking his own way, but



Synod of Dort

he gave the church leaders and he equips them by his Spirit to lead the congregation in the tasks he has put before it.

This is not always obvious to us. We tend to focus on the human and on each other's failings. But in doing so, we miss one of the miracles of the Spirit poured out on the church at Pentecost, namely that God works through people we select to keep the church functioning as his living body in this time and place.

We are, of course, eager to celebrate Christ's gifts to his church, but the gift of office comes with something that has grown increasingly distasteful to us in our individualistic society – authority. We not only dislike being told what to believe and what to do, we find it increasingly hard to take up a role that might require us to speak to someone in the name of divine authority.

Part of the reason undoubtedly is that in the past such authority was sometimes wielded heavy-handedly and without much tact. Instead of showing respect for the personhood of those addressed, it sometimes quashed it. And that is certainly not the purpose of the authority and discipline that Christ embodies in the offices of his church.

Yet, perhaps just as often the fault is with those of us who are being addressed. We feel we have the right to our own opinions and we are wholly competent to judge what constitutes a Christian lifestyle. We don't take kindly to being told by others what we consider more and more to be private matters.

But our faith, our beliefs and our way of life are not just private matters to be worked out just between me and my God. Scripture places us firmly and humanly in a social setting: we become part of a body of believers with a definite structure. We look after one another, and that requires discipling, discipline, order, leadership. And these are gifts that come from outside us.

Yes, of course, the church eagerly makes use of gifts, talents and training that bubble up from below,

from the varieties of people within the congregation. But the backbone of the church is the Word addressed to it from without and the authority that comes with that Word. This is true of the pastor, who is called not to tell the people in the pews what they want to hear or the latest popular advice from the self-help gurus but to proclaim what we are sometimes reluctant to hear and what we resist. What is true for the pastor is true for all leadership positions in the church, for the pastor is simply another elder.

We don't always see him as such. We tend to take more from a pastor than we'd be willing to take from an elder. I suspect that this is due to our respect for expertise and professionalism in our society. We see a pastor as something of a blend between a psychiatrist and a social worker and therefore as someone more authorized to speak with us on matters of faith. When we do this, we use the office of pastor to undermine the office of elder.

The authority of the office bearer does not derive from the congregation, nor is it founded in the charisma, virtue, piety or competence of the office bearer. At the same time, becoming a pastor or elder does not elevate someone to a higher, more spiritual level of being. God uses ordinary, natural people as they are for a time to give direction and structure to his people. He does not overwhelm our humanity and render it mute, but on the contrary, he seeks to cultivate and enhance the gifts that he has given us.

In giving us the great gift of office, God takes us into his confidence and we are called to cooperate with him. In exercising that office, pastors, elders and deacons draw the entire congregation and its various gifts into the orbit of God's work of saving and renewing all that he has made. Through office we find ourselves plugged into the mission of God in Christ, a mission that extends beyond the boundaries of any congregation or church to the whole of God's Kingdom.

My reflections on office were inspired by the ordination of elders and deacons in our church, but they are also prompted by the study of the Form of Subscription for Office-bearers that will come before CRC Synod this summer. Quite a number of overtures are included in the Agenda raising questions and objections to the thrust of the newly proposed form.

I get the impression that the new form is looking for a way to avoid, or at least to soften, the offense to our contemporary sensibilities of an authority that comes to us from outside mediated by ordinary human beings. I don't want to suggest that there's nothing in our way of requiring our leaders to pledge to uphold the teachings of the church through the ages that can be improved. Although any changes that weaken our awareness that the church in its offices is called to remain faithful to its confession may make it easier for some of us to serve as elders and deacons, I don't believe that it will serve to strengthen the church in its ministry.

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Canada

Letters

Show trial



David Warren

David Warren

The writings of Canada's most talented journalist, Mark Steyn, went on trial in Vancouver on Monday, June 2, in a case designed to challenge freedom of the press. It is a show trial, under the arbitrary powers given to Canada's obscene "human rights" commissions, by Section 13 of our Human Rights Act.

I wrote "obscene" advisedly. Before Canada's "human rights" tribunals, a respondent has none of the defences formerly guaranteed in common law. The truth is no defence, reasonable intention is no defence, nor material harmlessness, there are no rules of evidence, no precedents, nor case law of any kind. The commissars running the tribunals need have no legal training, exhibit none, and owe their appointments to networking among leftwing activists.

I wrote "show trial" advisedly, for there has been a 100 percent conviction rate in cases brought to "human rights" tribunals under Section 13.

Take this in:

A group of Islamist fanatics, claiming to speak for every Muslim in Canada, charged *Maclean's* magazine with "spreading hatred against Muslims" for having printed a lucid and reasonable (if controversial) excerpt from Steyn's bestselling book, *America Alone*. This is a news story that should be on the front page of every newspaper in Canada, every day until it is resolved.

Everything about this case stinks to high heaven. It was brought before three different "human rights" tribunals simultaneously. The British Columbian venue was openly "jurisdiction shopped" because the province's human rights tribunals have an especially egregious record for ignoring respondents' most basic charter rights. The charges were brought more than a year after the article appeared. There was an open attempt at extortion, when representatives of the complainant called a press conference in which an offer was made to retract the charges for unspecified considerations. And so on: a layering of affronts to the most elementary standards of justice and decency.

The case is the more ludicrous because the allegations brought are semi-literate (for instance, Steyn's quotations of lunatic



Mark Steyn

Islamist imams are confused with Steyn's own assertions). The remedies sought keep changing; the arguments keep changing; the explanation of why the complainant has brought the case and what he hopes to gain from it has kept changing. And now the show trial has begun, the prosecution is presenting a parade of entirely irrelevant testimony. (Has Steyn properly understood the Koran? Etc.)

A farce, but a farce that has huge consequences for Canada: for by such methods free speech and free press are being snuffed out. The Left may think they have found the ideal method to silence anyone who challenges their insane, "politically correct" ideas, but have instead created a monster that can as easily eat them next.

This is a disaster also for Canada's Muslims, for the views of fanatical Islamists are being presented as representative of them all. No single person has done so much to advance contempt for Islam in this country as Mohamed Elmasry, president of the "Canadian Islamic Congress," the complainant in this case – whose public assertions have included e.g. the view that every Israeli citizen is a valid target for Palestinian hitmen.

The bland acceptance of this jackass, by mainstream Canadian media, as the definitive spokesman for Muslim interests in Canada, cannot be blamed on the Muslim community. Innumerable Muslims have disavowed him, and yet are entirely ignored. Indeed: Mark Steyn has been among the few journalists distinguishing between camps. He would be: for he has plenty of Muslim supporters.

There is some good news. It appears the Harper government has finally been goaded into calling a public inquiry into proceedings of at least the federal "human rights" commission. Some good may come from public confirmation of the outrageous, often sick behaviour of its members and hangers-on – which Canada's leading bloggers have been documenting.

But the problem is at once more urgent and much broader than any carefully-focused inquiry can present. For what radical activists have achieved through "human rights" commissions is now endemic, in all kinds of "star chamber" and "kangaroo court" operations, in everything from the tax system to provisions of family law.

Another crucial point:

While media attention to Mark Steyn's show trial is inadequate (it is getting more attention in the United States than up here), it is nevertheless the best publicized case ever to come before our "human rights" bureaucracies. Most of the victims of these neo-Maoist tribunals have been "little people," with nothing like the resources *Maclean's* magazine has put in play to defend itself and Steyn, and no media reporting whatever. They have been persecuted, stripped of their livelihoods and savings, demonized among their neighbours, made to endure humiliating "re-education" programs – without lawyers, without assistance of any kind – all for exercising rights that any Canadian would have taken for granted a mere generation ago.

I want justice for Mark Steyn. But I also want justice for all these little people, who have been crushed under the jackboot of "political correction."

This column first appeared in the Ottawa Citizen, June 4. Used with permission. For an archive of David Warren's newspaper columns, see: <http://www.davidwarrenonline.com>

Geleynse on leadership

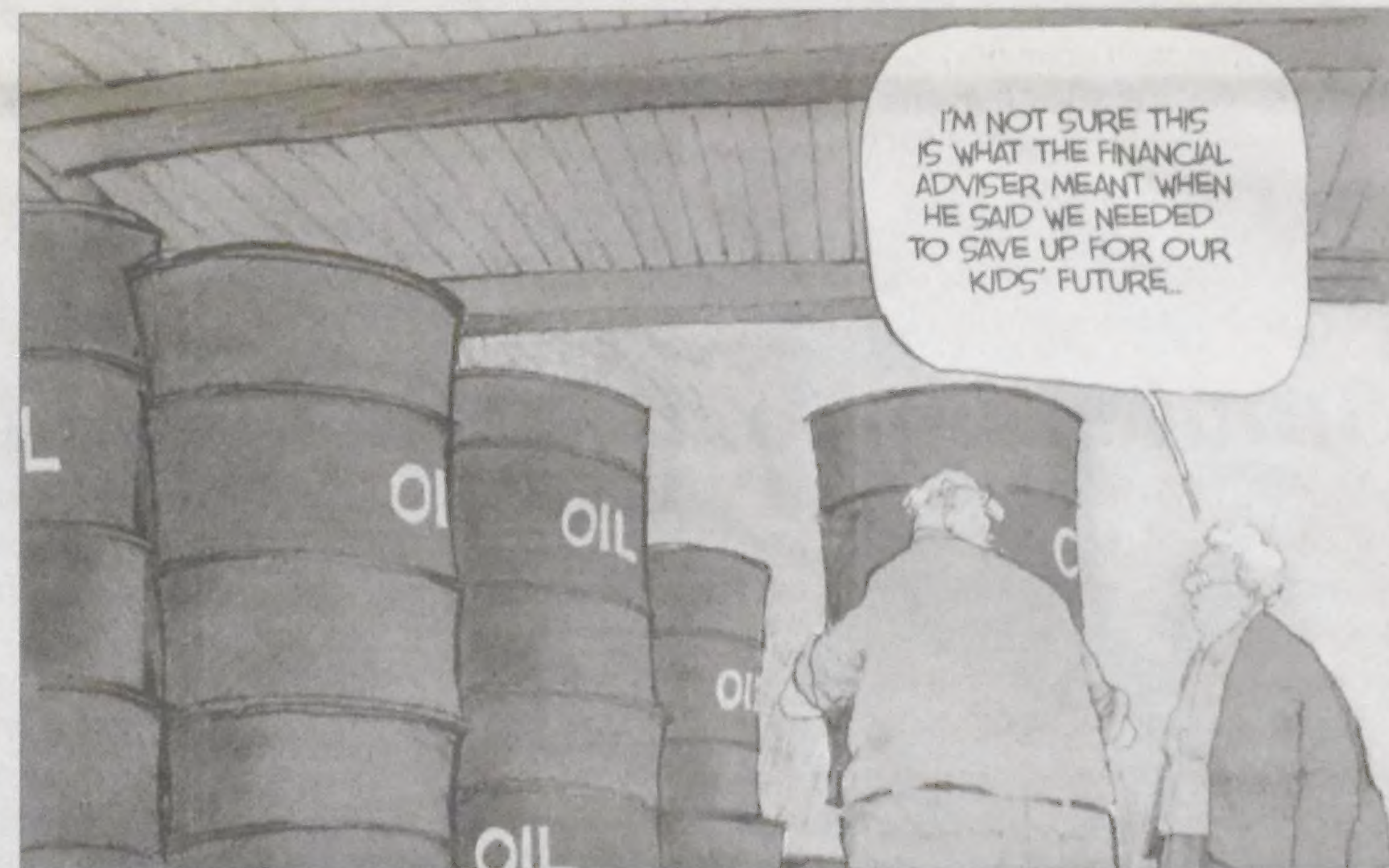
My hat off to Martin D. Geleynse and his accurate view on leadership. Why don't we hear more of the same from other older pastors? Our churches are totally on the wrong track with their business approach to ruling the church. And when we say something about the way they come with proposals and ideas; we are told, you are old fashioned and not in touch with how the church is to be all-embracing and be open to all people. As if that did not happen years ago. We just did not use the in-language which is all new now.

Our local church is going on its own and taking decisions that are not legal and authorized by our denomination. The younger generation does not know differently; the older generation is in the minority and feels left out and is tired of arguing. The middle-aged group from 30 to 50 is business oriented and do what they see is right.

Since when is the only pastor called the senior pastor?

I could go on and on, but will not as this will not change anything at all as I am one of the older generation.

Ina and Henk Timmerman
Cambridge On.



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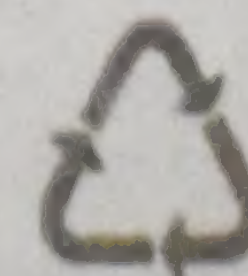
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Opinion

America and Israel

James Skillen

Religions are ways of life and not merely the consciously intended practices of worship and pastoral service. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim ways of life are supposed to guide the adherents of those faiths in what they do all week long and not only in the ways they worship. Religions as ways of life generally function like the glasses through which we see things; we are not always conscious of the glasses (or our eyes) when we see things, even though they are what make it possible to focus on anything in particular.

In this light it is possible to understand why the American way of life is often overlooked when people talk about religion, even though it often challenges or conflicts with the ways of life called for by the scriptures and authorities of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communions. The American way of life might not structure our Saturday or Sunday worship services, but it certainly functions as the glasses through which many Americans see and make sense of their daily lives. Let me illustrate.

We will never adequately understand America's support for the State of Israel unless we recognize that support as an expression of the American civil religion or way of life, which is often in conflict or tension with other religious ways of life. I am discovering the depth of the tensions among these religions as I write a paper on three Zionisms, a paper that will be part of a forthcoming book on religion in international affairs. The three Zionisms are (1) American new-Israelitism, (2) Jewish Zionism, and (3) contemporary Christian Zionism. These three Zionisms are very powerful influences shaping political practice and foreign policy decisions.

Consider the current American presidential campaign. In May, one of Barack Obama's advisers on Middle East policy, Robert Malley, was strongly criticized by pro-Israel

advocates (both Christians and Jews) for having said that Israel as well as the Palestinians had been responsible for the failure of peace talks during the Clinton administration and for meeting more recently with officials of Hamas, which now controls the Gaza region of the Palestinian territory and is considered a terrorist organization by the George W. Bush administration. Obama felt compelled to dismiss Malley immediately from any formal advisory role in his campaign and assured critics that he is as fully supportive of Israel as Hillary Clinton and John McCain are.

Commenting on the Malley-Obama incident, Gordon Rachman (*Financial Times*, 5/27/08) writes that it's a shame the presidential candidates cannot even raise critical questions about Israel without fear of being denounced by the powerful Christian and Jewish pro-Israel lobbies in the United States. "This taboo is all the more bizarre," says Rachman, "since the Israeli government itself is currently negotiating with Hamas." Rachman adds that the "last time I was in Jerusalem, Israeli officials complained to me that the US's refusal to talk to the Syrians was foolish . . . Now it turns out that the Israelis themselves are holding talks with Syria – but sponsored by Turkey, not the US." Rachman also quotes a McCain spokesman who said, "It is easier to have an open discussion on Palestine in Tel Aviv than in Washington." "Why is the American debate so constrained?" asks Rachman. It is, he says, because Jewish and Christian evangelical voters are so "fervently pro-Israel." But why, we must ask, are those voters so fervently and powerfully pro-Israel?

An adequate answer to the last question cannot be developed here, but it would move along the following lines. American Christian Zionists are convinced that the end of history and God's final judgment of the world will follow the fulfillment of certain biblical prophecies, which include God's blessing or cursing of America

depending on whether America stands firm behind the State of Israel. American Jewish Zionists are strongly pro-Israel not for reasons of biblical prophecy but out of commitment to the success of modern Jewish nationalism, and they, too, demand American commitment to Israel above all else. And why are these two Zionisms so closely connected to the United States? This is where American new-Israelitism comes in. The American way of life is predicated on the conviction that God chose this nation to be a new Israel, a light to the world, a city set on a hill, to lead the world to freedom and democracy. And this new-covenant nation should now support the State of Israel (which represents God's old covenant people returning to the Promised Land) in order that the fulfillment of end-times prophecies will include God's blessing (rather than cursing) of America.

Now you may think that all of this is theological nonsense or beside the point, politically speaking. But you'd be wrong. Even though America's actual influence in the Middle East has been declining and many of its pro-Israel policies failing, the unquestioned civil-religious faith of Americanism that helps to sustain Jewish Zionism and Christian Zionism lives on and is even gaining strength among vast numbers of Americans. And if any candidate wants to succeed in politics, he or she had better toe this line if they want support from the pro-Israel lobby.

To open a genuine public debate about American policy in the Middle East, therefore, will take more than standard political arguments. It will require debates that go all the way down to the religiously deep ways of life that drive peoples and nations. And it will require coming to grips with the religious character of the American way of life.

James W. Skillen is the President of the Center for Public Justice. This article was the latest in Root & Branch, a publication on the religion and society debate. See <http://www.cpjjustice.org/>

Studies support abstinence education

WASHINGTON, D.C. (BP) – Abstinence education is effective at delaying sexual initiation and reducing the levels of early sexual activity, according to two studies presented last month at the National Press Club in Washington.

A study led by Stan Weed of the Institute of Research and Evaluation examined the impact of abstinence education in reducing the initiation of sexual activity by seventh-grade students (12- and 13-year-olds) in suburban Virginia. The second study, which reviewed 21 abstinence education programs and found that 16 of them reported positive results, was published by The Heritage Foundation.

Both studies were presented in conjunction with hearings by the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. The hearings featured seven witnesses speaking in support of comprehensive sex education and two testifying in favor of abstinence education, with a goal of assessing the need for continued abstinence education funding.

Weed's study, published in the January/February edition of the *American Journal of Health Behavior*, evaluated the Virginia Abstinence Education Initiative by tracking the behavior of seventh-graders in five different Virginia schools.

Students receiving abstinence education, the study concluded, were half as likely to initiate sexual activity as students who did not receive abstinence education.

"The fundamental question here is, 'Can you change or influence adolescent behavior?' and the answer to that, as this and other studies in abstinence education demonstrate, is yes," said Weed, who was scheduled to present his findings at the House hearing.

He continued, "Abstinence education has been a mainstream curriculum for less than a decade." Weed added, "That is a very short time to measure the success of a program, but this study indicates that properly targeted, focused and implemented policies, programs and funding streams can turn the trends of negative behavioral consequences in a positive direction."

Parents favour abstinence

The Heritage Foundation study, a background paper written by Christine Kim and Robert Rector, noted that each year about 2.6 million American teenagers become sexually active – a rate of 7,000 teens per day. Among high school students, nearly half acknowledge having engaged in sexual activity and one-third are currently active, the authors reported.

"Abstinence education 'teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children' and stresses the social, psychological and health benefits of abstinence," the paper said.

"... Opponents of abstinence education contend that these programs fail to influence teen sexual behavior. At this stage, the available evidence supports neither this assessment nor the wholesale dismissal of authentic abstinence education programs."

Of the 21 studies of abstinence education included in the Heritage Foundation paper, 15 studies examined abstinence programs that were primarily intended to teach abstinence. Of those 15 studies, 11 reported positive findings. The other six studies analyzed virginity pledges, and of those six studies, five reported positive findings, the authors wrote.

Government funding goes to comprehensive sex education

programs even though a Zogby International poll last year found that 80 percent of parents want their children to abstain from sexual activity until they're in a committed adult relationship.

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, applauded The Heritage Foundation for a careful review of 21 abstinence education programs. "All of the evidence shows that sexual abstinence is the healthiest behavior for youth," Perkins said. "Teaching and equipping youth with the skills to practice this behavior is the goal of genuine abstinence education."

Perkins added, "The government does not promote drug use or underage drinking, and it should not promote risky sexual behavior either."

Not in Canada

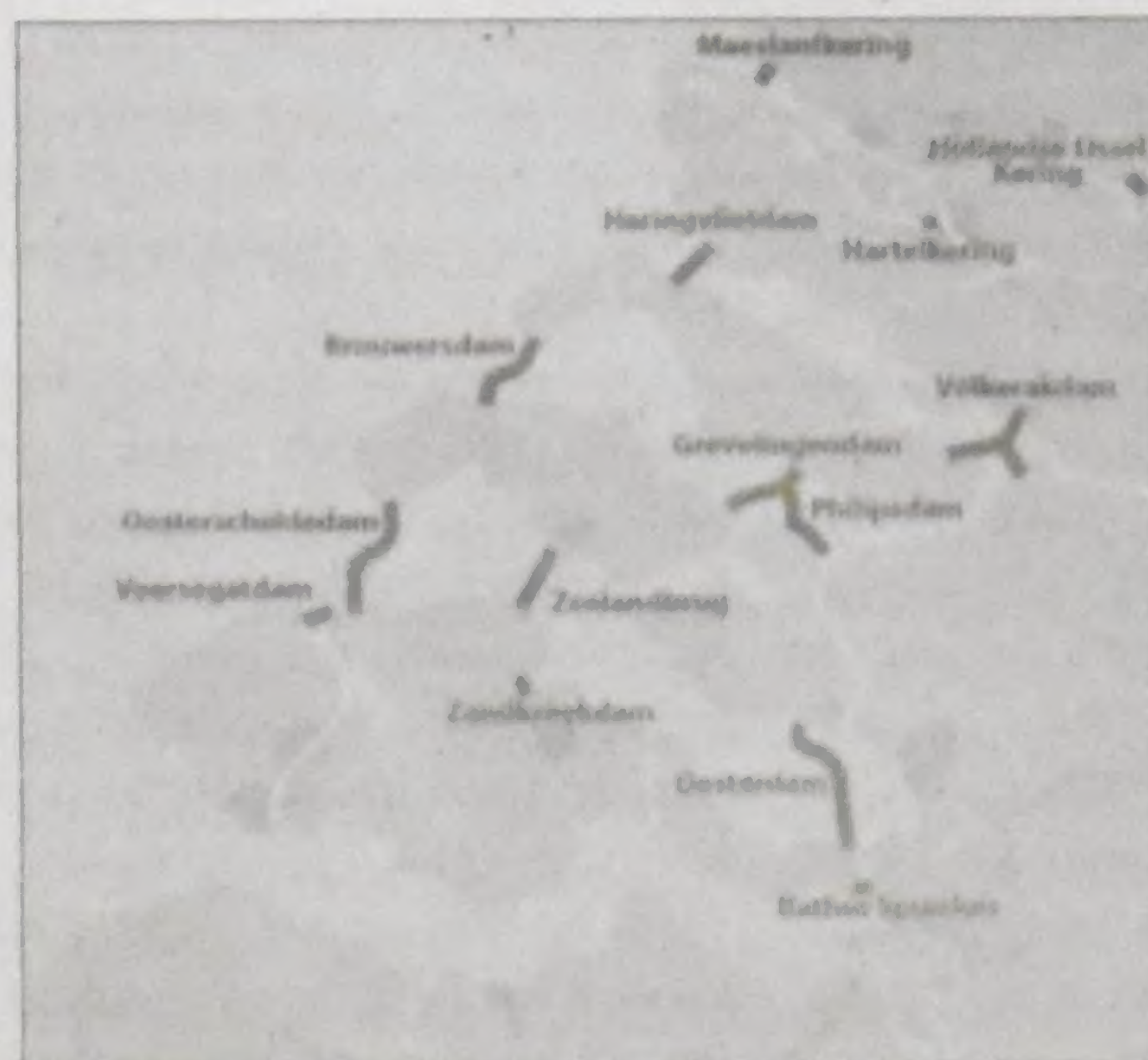
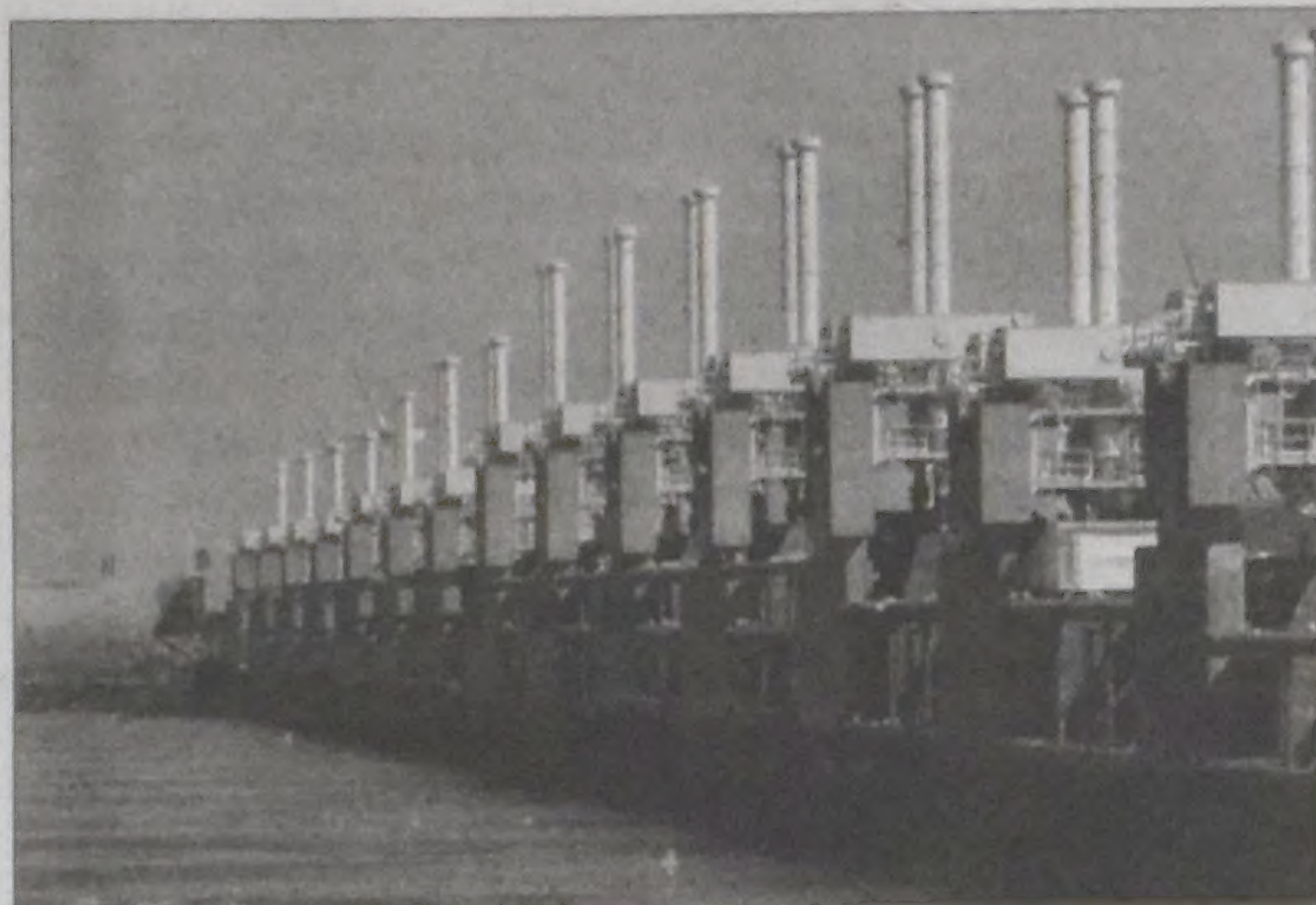
Abstinence-only sexuality education programs are rare in Canada, where comprehensive sexuality education programs are the established norm. While provincial governments ultimately have jurisdiction over education issues, both provincial and federal mandates call for comprehensive sexuality education in public schools.

In Alberta and Saskatchewan, a few local public school boards have enacted programs that resemble American abstinence-only sexuality education, despite the fact that comprehensive sexuality education is mandated. But for the most part Canadian sexuality education is overwhelmingly comprehensive in nature, including the addressing of sexual health, contraception (in some cases handing out condoms), protection from sexually transmitted diseases and acceptances of "differing sexual orientations."

His famous (opa) grandfather

Turning to me she whispered, "He's a newcomer, from Holland"

The mighty Delta Works could wait.



Rick DeGraaf

Managing Caesar

Most of the money I earn I use for my family, and myself but only after our Caesars (Harper and McGuinty) take their cut through payroll deductions. We can "manage Caesar" to maximize what we keep by reducing what Caesar gets, as in the following examples:

Professionals can save you money – use them to address ‘capital gains’ issues to minimize Caesar’s cut.

These are just a few things that a steward can do to ensure that Caesar only gets what he is entitled to, and your capacity for Kingdom giving will be enhanced.

Stewardly tip: Exit sign power saver. All public buildings are required to have permanently illuminated exit signs. Typically, each sign is illuminated by two 15 watt bulbs which over the year consumes 262 kWh of electricity which at the rate of \$0.11 per kWh is \$28.91 per year. By swapping the old bulbs for new LED bulbs designed for this application (at a cost of about \$10 per bulb) you can cut the operating cost to \$1.93 of electricity per year. The bulbs pay for themselves in the 1st year and have a rated life of over 100,000 hours (over 10 years)! Now imagine if all exit signs in Canada were to be switched over – what a saving in energy! Thanks to Dr. Henry Brouwer of Redeemer University College for this tip!

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Harvesting the sun


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Church

Radical Islam will fill 'moral vacuum' left by retreat from Christianity: British Bishop

Marian Van Til, with files from *Christian Today*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*

ROCHESTER, UK – A senior bishop in the Church of England has ignited a fiery public discussion over his critique of British society that includes this assertion: the demise of Christianity in Britain has left a "moral vacuum" that radical Islam is ready to fill.

The 106th Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, says that social and sexual revolution of the 1960s led to a steep decline in the influence of Christianity over society which church leaders did nothing to counteract. And Christianity began to fall by the wayside just as increased numbers of people of other faiths were starting to settle in Britain, the Pakistani-born bishop added.

Nazir-Ali's parents converted to Christianity from Islam and thus became "infidels" and subject to persecution in their native Pakistan. Their now famous son was also born in Karachi. His family experience makes him sensitive to the trials faced by Christians in Muslim-majority countries. The awareness obviously influences his life's work.

Britain's disregard for Christianity "is a situation which has created the moral and spiritual vacuum in which we find ourselves," says Nazir-Ali. "Whilst the Christian consensus was dissolved, nothing else, except

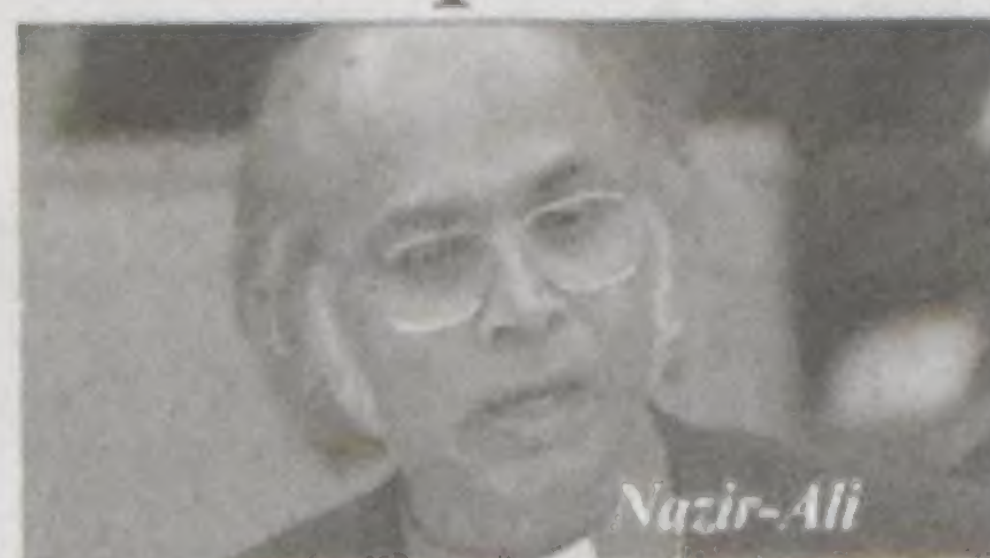
perhaps endless self-indulgence, was put in its place." This has led to the destruction of family life, rising levels of drug abuse and drunkenness and violence in the streets.

Death threats

Whereas Marxism failed to gain much of a foothold in British society in the 20th century, Nazir-Ali questions whether the UK now will be able to counter radical Islam with the same success. "We are now, however, confronted by another equally serious ideology, that of radical Islamism, which also claims to be comprehensive in scope," he said. "What resources do we have to face yet another ideological battle?"

Bishop Nazir-Ali answered his own question: "It remains the case, however, that many of the beliefs and values which we need to deal with the present situation are rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition."

Earlier this year Nazir-Ali faced death threats after he asserted that multiculturalism had failed and that radical Islam was turning some areas of Britain into "no-go areas" for people of different faiths. He believes that Britain's devotion to multiculturalism has been "insecurely founded," and that this approach has created communities of immigrants who are "segregated" and "living parallel lives."



Nazir-Ali

Our duty to witness

In late May, Bishop Nazir-Ali was one of only three Church of England bishops in all of the UK to support a motion to July's general synod in York put forward by lay member Paul Eddy which asks that the church take seriously its task to evangelize, including evangelizing Muslims. As a foundation to that motion, Eddy's motion requests the Church of England to openly confess that Christ is the only way to salvation.

Bishop Nazir-Ali resounded, "In the context of our dialogue with [non-Christians] it is our duty to witness to our faith and to call people to faith in Jesus Christ, whilst recognizing that people of other faiths may have similar responsibilities."

He concluded, "Cooperation among faiths arises from recognition of distinctives and not by diluting what we believe merely for the sake of good relations. It is God who converts our task to bear witness faithfully in every context in which we find ourselves."

Bible burning targeted at Messianic Jews

ORYEHUDA, Israel (CWN) – There are reports that some ultra-Orthodox Jews recently burned New Testaments in the town of Or Yehuda. It is the latest in a series of incidents within Israel against Messianic Jews, those who believe Jesus is the Messiah.

Uzi Aharon, deputy mayor of Or Yehuda, organized the burnings of the New Testaments, according to the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv*, which first reported the story.

Some of the Bibles were printed by the Bible Society in Israel. Victor Kalisher is the director of the Bible Society. "To see that such books are being burnt, it is shocking," he said. "As a Jew, as a son of a Holocaust survivor, when I see something like that it only tells me that many dangerous things will probably follow if we don't do something [about it] now."

Though Deputy Mayor Aharon's picture appears prominently in *Ma'ariv* related to the incident, Aharon claims he did not take part in the burning but simply stopped young Yeshiva students when he saw what they were doing. Aharon apologized for the incident but blamed Messianic Jews for the problem.

The Prime Minister's spokesperson, however, called it "a despicable act," and the Anti-Defamation League said the Bible burning was "a violation of basic Jewish principles and values." The American Jewish Committee said, "No provocation can justify such outrageous behavior."

Harassment not uncommon

Despite those positive reactions on behalf of followers of Yeshua (Jesus), *Haaretz*, a prominent Israeli newspaper, said "The burning of Christian holy books in Or Yehuda is especially worrisome in light of the continued harassment of Messianic Jews...."

The most violent harassment took place on March 20. A bomb disguised as a holiday gift exploded in the home of David and Leah Ortiz nearly killing their 15-year-old son, Ami. It also destroyed much of their apartment.

Now, more than two months later, there have been no arrests. The family's attorney claims police are not pursuing their investigation. Earlier this week, police failed in court to stop an



Israeli news channel from broadcasting a report critical of the handling of the case.

Within the current atmosphere, the director of the Israel Bible Society, Victor Kalasha, is concerned that attacks against Messianic Jews will be tolerated. "If the leaders of religious groups, people of leadership, people who should be role models are described as people who initiate and support burning of books with students dancing around it, the next day we can have people hurt, we can have windows broken, we can have a burnt shop," he said. "We cannot ignore it. We cannot think that ... it's an isolated incident. It is not."

Kalasha's views are shared by Messianic Jews throughout Israel. They're asking believers around the world to pray for them in this time of increased persecution.

Reactions to 'Britain's prophet'

Britain's newspapers and Internet blogs have been full of responses – positive and negative – to Nazir-Ali's statements, but his views are minority opinion in the UK. However, he has strong support from the evangelical wing of the Church of England and from other orthodox Christians. Evangelical Anglicans, some observers say, are becoming increasingly confident even as the mainstream of their church slides away from biblical Christianity.

Riazat Butt, a writer for *The Guardian* calls Nazir-Ali a "prophet," and "prophets are rejected by their own, like Jesus was." The bishop's impact on the Church of England ("an institution famed for fudges and niceties") has been "bold," says Butt.

Transferring his Angst?

Canon Chris Chivers of Blackburn Cathedral told *The Guardian* that Nazir-Ali "makes my job harder." Chivers works in "interfaith and community cohesion" issues for the cathedral. "What he surely meant to say is that the decline of Christianity, which has been going on since the 18th century, is perceived by some as being exacerbated by a community that has a strong identity and set of values. He is transferring his angst and insecurity, remembering what it used to be like when Christianity had these things. He articulates a view held by people in the pews, but whether it's held by the bench of bishops is another matter."

The Guardian noted that Nazir-Ali's views "have earned him some unflattering nicknames." But Andrew Brown, the church commentator, sees

the situation politically. Brown likens Nazir-Ali to a Cambridge don. "He's conservative, he's clever and he's old-fashioned," Brown told *The Guardian*. "We may not like him, but he is formidable. Whether he knows it or not, questions about Islam are a great way to marginalize liberals and will become the new battleground for the evangelical wing of the Church of England."

Gates of hell shall not prevail

In the *Telegraph*, a major paper somewhat to the right of *The Guardian*, correspondent and blogger Damian Thompson assented to the view seldom spoken in Britain "that Islam is fundamentally and implacably an enemy of the Christian faith," and that "at the moment, the Church of England and the English Catholic Church are their own worst enemies." Most *Telegraph* bloggers supported the bishop and were not afraid to say so.

One wrote: "Homosexuality, Islam, or any other 'hot button' issue are divisive for Christians, but they are not at the root of divisiveness. What matters is whether you truly believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died and rose from the dead...."

Thompson did not rule out that "Islam, not gays, will split the Church." Responding to that one person wrote: "No it won't, for the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church of God. The Lord Jesus Christ said so. So what you are really saying is that the edifice you think is the church will be split, which in turn tells us that the edifice you are referring to is not the church at all but a counterfeit posing as a church, without the power of Holy Spirit."

Myanmar Christians tell stories of hope

YANGON, Burma (CWN) – In the midst of tragedy and what seems like countless deaths, there are many stories of survival and hope in Myanmar.

Orphans are cramped into a house church on their knees praying that God will provide them with the means to rebuild their house. They are thankful they escaped the bamboo shack just moments before it was blown to pieces by Cyclone Nargis.

Cin Khan Lun shares how the big church next to her house swayed back and forth in the wind when the cyclone struck at midnight. She believes God miraculously saved her and her family. "I prayed to God to send his angels to protect us," she said. "He gave me the verse in Nahum 1:7. 'The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble for those who trust in him.' I believe the

angels stretched their big wings to keep the big church from falling in the direction of our house."

Pastor Steven Len Piang is deeply saddened by the death of one of his church workers and family who were serving in the Irrawaddy Delta area. Zaw Moe Aung, 29, along with his wife and 10-year-old daughter were swept away into the sea at the height of the cyclone. But in the midst of this tragedy, Pastor Steven believes in God's divine purpose.

Revival in midst of death

"Nargis is a Hindu term for snake. In the bible snake symbolizes Satan but Satan can't work without God's permission. I believe this is a wake-up call to all Christians, especially to the Karen tribe, which is the biggest Christian tribe in Myanmar and the first recipients

See Myanmar on page 11

Church

Bishop: British Parliament approves 'horror'

Denounces OK'ing human-animal hybrids

VATICAN CITY (Zenit) – The British Parliament has approved one of the horrors that has always been rejected by ethics, says the president of the Pontifical Academy for Life. Members of Parliament approved 336-176 on May 19 the creation of hybrid embryos made by introducing human DNA into animal ova. The measure aims to compensate for a "shortage" of human embryos used for embryonic stem cell research.

Catholic Bishop Elio Sgreccia told Vatican Radio that the law is particularly grave from the ethical point of view since "it constitutes an offense against the dignity of man. It is an attempt of fertilization between species that until now has been prohibited by all the laws on artificial fertilization. Human-animal union, even if it is not sexual, represents one of the horrors that has always brought rejection in ethics." He emphasized that "every time the wall between man and animal has been broken, very grave consequences, even involuntary ones, have arisen."

According to the new law, hybrid embryos

should be destroyed within 14 days of their creation. Implantation in utero of either women or animals is also prohibited. This means, Bishop Sgreccia explained, that for the law, embryos younger than 15 days "are not worth anything – something that is scientifically false." And if these embryos were left to live, "monstrosities could arise, or infections could be promoted, since the passage of human DNA to animal DNA could create unknowns."

In this situation, Bishop Sgreccia contended, "We must pray for a type of conversion of the press: instead of obeying the indications of interested groups, they should obey the truth, so as not to create illusions, with the objective of human compassion, about paths that have not yet offered any results."

False scenario

Many press reports of the debate have painted the vote as a case of science versus religion, and particularly science versus the Catholic Church. Prime Minister Gordon Brown proposed in an article in the *Observer* the following week that morality was on the side of the creation of human-animal hybrids. He said scientists and researchers "believe

they can combine this work with a deep commitment to the highest ethical standards and a sincere respect for religious beliefs."

The same day, a spokesperson for the Church in Scotland, Peter Kearney, said pointedly, "There is nothing moral about the treatment of human life as a commodity, which is what this bill does." The *London Times* also published two letters to the editors, in which other Christian leaders and a representative of Islam affirmed that the debate over the creation of hybrids is not about "respect for [others] religious beliefs."

A letter signed by 15 Christian leaders noted, "We have been somewhat concerned that anyone reading the newspapers of late may have got the impression that opposition to the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill comes narrowly from Roman Catholics. It doesn't. Indeed, opposition is in no way restricted to people of faith."

"However, as the bill commences its consideration in the House of Commons we would like to make it plain that as people from other Christian traditions we are completely opposed to the creation of animal-human hybrids, savior siblings and the removal of

the obligation on IVF clinics to consider the child's need for a father.

"This is not a narrowly Roman Catholic issue, nor is it a narrowly Christian issue nor indeed is it a narrowly religious issue. It is a human issue. We need to fight to uphold and protect our humanity."

Muslims also opposed

Doctor A. Majid Katme added that Muslims are also against the idea of hybrids. "Islam prohibits the making of a new creation through a cross-species hybrid... Every human embryo is a human being and is fully respected and protected in Islam – yet the bill will destroy countless of thousands of embryos."

Katme continued, "We fully support scientific and medical progress aimed at finding the causes and treatment of diseases. Seeking to use stem cells from this new unnatural, man-animal production is knocking on the wrong door, especially when there have been many successful medical results using adult stem cells, an ethical alternative. Muslim doctors, Muslim parents and the British Muslims generally will oppose strongly this bill, a minefield of dangers and immorality."

Gospel of Judas show mislead millions

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) – More than two years after National Geographic released a book and aired a documentary about the gospel of Judas asserting that the biblical traitor really was a hero, an increasing number of scholars are casting doubts on the controversial claim.

The latest criticism comes in the most recent issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* magazine *The Chronicle Review*, where a 5,000-word article tells how the National Geographic project has divided longtime scholarly friends and co-workers, with dissenters saying the National Geographic team – led by Marvin Meyer, a professor of religious studies at Chapman University – mistranslated the gospel of Judas so badly that it ended up saying the opposite of what a proper translation would have rendered.

The subhead on the article asks, "Did a 'dream team' of biblical scholars mislead millions?" For instance, instead of Jesus saying to Judas, "O 13th spirit, why do you try so hard" – as National Geographic had it saying – it should instead have read, "O 13th demon, why do you try so hard?" Even the number 13 is significant – it "would indicate a realm ruled by the demon Ialdabaoth" and would not have been a compliment, *The Chronicle Review* says.

'Scholarly malpractice'

The newer translation of the gospel of Judas comes from April D. DeConick, a professor of biblical studies at Rice University who has written a book about the Judas gospel. But she is not the only critic. The magazine said the "early voices of dissent have since grown into a chorus, some of whom argue that National Geographic's handling of the project amounts to scholarly malpractice."

DeConick told *The Chronicle Review* there were other major flaws with the translation:

* One passage, according to National Geographic, says Judas "would ascend to the holy generation." Instead, it should include a negative and say he would not ascend to the holy generation.

* Another passage, according to National Geographic, says Judas was "set apart for the holy generation." It should, though, say "from."

Both sides of the debate agree that the events in the gospel of Judas did not literally take place and are instead fiction, the magazine said. The question centers on the translation and whether it should have an impact on how early Christians are viewed. Orthodox scholars say the document simply shows that heresy existed at the time.

The document was discovered within the past few decades, but Christians long have known it once existed, thanks to the writings of the early church father Irenaeus, who was bishop of Lyons and lived in the second century. Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies*, in which he called the gospel of Judas "fictitious history." But, until now, a copy of it was not known to have existed.

The newly discovered document was dated to around A.D. 300, although it likely is a copy of an earlier manuscript, scholars said. Whatever the case, the gospel was not written by eyewitnesses, and long after the biblical Gospels.

Secrecy and 'shock'

National Geographic, the critics say, did not follow normal scholarly practice of allowing a careful, deliberate review of the document by multiple scholars. Instead,

National Geographic drafted a team of scholars, required them to keep the project secret and then announced the supposed shocking translation of the document at a news conference, which, of course, coincided with the book and TV program. Translating ancient documents often takes years, *The Chronicle Review* said.

Newspaper headlines during April 2006 made Judas seem like a hero. "Ancient Text Says Jesus Asked Judas to Hand Him to the Romans," said one headline. Another read: "Ancient Judas as 'good guy,' not Jesus' betrayer."

Craig A. Evans, a professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College, is a friend of Meyer's but blames him for making "glaring mistakes" in the translation.

"It isn't really National Geographic's fault if the lead editor and interpreter is a dominant personality, gets all excited, and interprets it in a certain way," said Evans. "I have a feeling that once the interpretation began moving that way, National Geographic got excited. They knew they had a bombshell."

But even Meyer says in dealing with National Geographic he and others "have found things to be highly irregular in terms of how we do things in scholarship." One example, the magazine reported, took place when Meyer was helping with a scene in the documentary in which he stands in a cave in Egypt, telling how the gospel of Judas was found.

"The director, according to Meyer, wanted him to say that that very cave was the cave where the codex was found," *The Chronicle*



Detail of a stained-glass window at Sainte-Chapelle, Paris: "The Betrayal of Christ" depicting the kiss of Judas.

Review said. "But, of course, no one knows that, and there are a lot of burial caves in Egypt. In the end, Meyer says on camera that it was probably found in a cave like the one he's standing in. The pressure to sacrifice truth for drama, he says, was constant."

Yet another false gospel

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote on his weblog recently that *The Chronicle Review's* story helps shed light on the matter.

"It is clear that the media were misled – and that the media then mislead their audiences," Mohler wrote. "Now, when the integrity of the entire project is called into doubt, the media are far less interested. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* is to be commended, the National Geographic Society should be humiliated, and Christians should be reminded once again not to be shaken by media sensationalism. The discovery of the Gospel of Judas changes nothing except to add yet another manuscript to the pile of false gospels and Gnostic documents."

Break-outs and break-ins



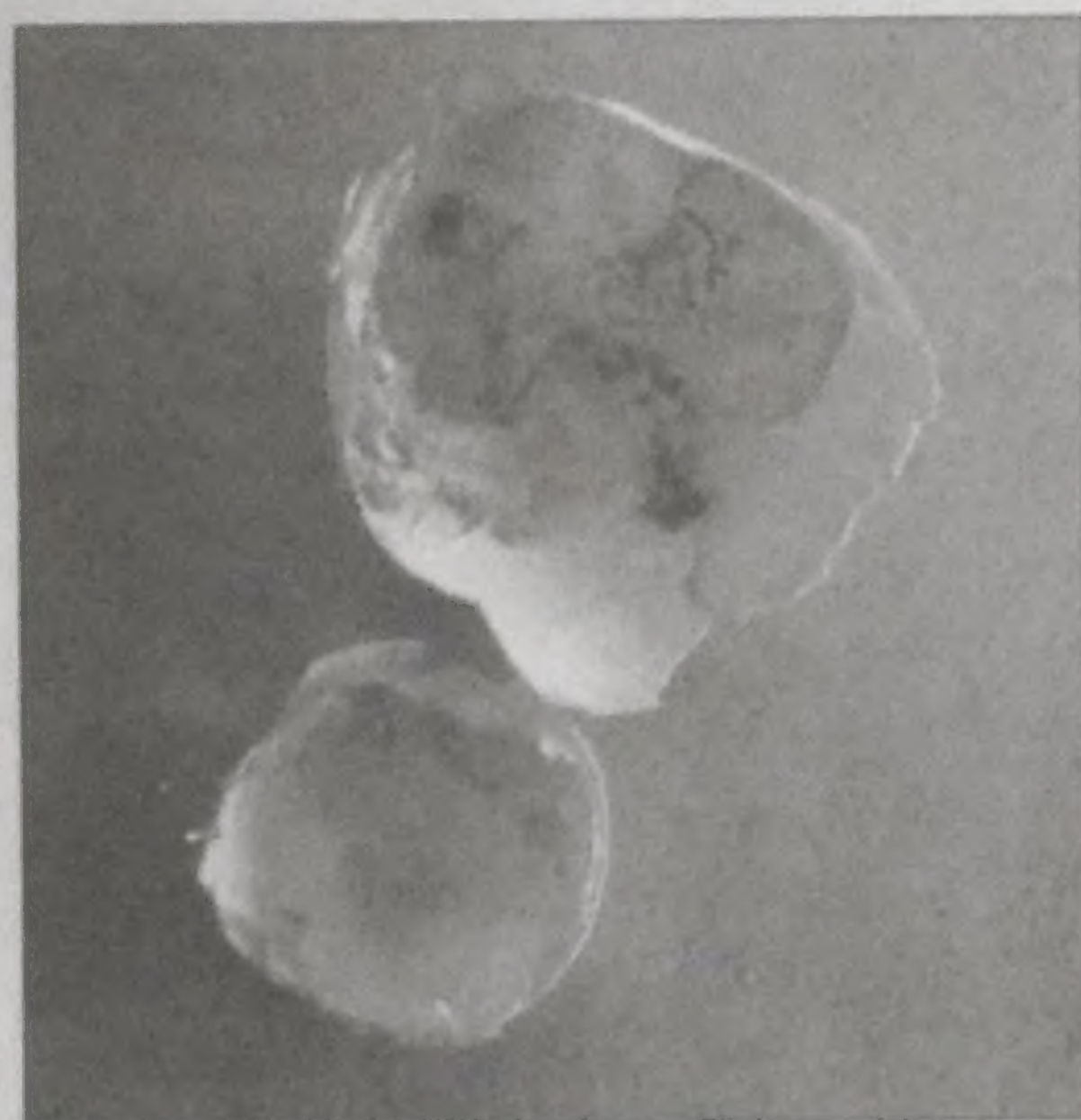
Eggshell baptism

In our congregation (Telkwa Christian Reformed Church) some elders and/or deacons try to visit each family when a new child is born or adopted. We talk about baptism, take suggestions for favourite hymns, pledge our support to the family, offer congratulations, and so on. When there are older children in the family, it is also a good time to talk to them a little bit about baptism. Here is an account of one of those lessons given for Lucas, whose little sister Rebecca, had just been baptised.



Hey, Lucas, look here. What's this?
You're right: It's an eggshell.
I ate the egg for breakfast. Do you like to eat eggs?
Notice how clean it is inside. I didn't even wash it.

Now look at this eggshell.



It's kinda dirty. And there is a some sort of soft rubbery thing there.
Not too pretty, is it. (My wife doesn't even like me to touch those things – she says they're salmonella factories, whatever that means.)

But the dirtier broken eggshell is even more valuable than the clean one, the shell from the egg I ate.

The dirty one is dirty now, but look what was inside it.

The chick is there because the mother hen sat on that egg for 21 days. It must have been pretty boring.



But even a "dumb cluck" cared about her eggs. And now she will brood over the little chick to keep it warm, show it how to drink water, and how to decide which bits of things are food and which are just dust, dirt, or bits of hay.

The chick is pretty lucky to have have a mother that hatched it out, and will take care of it.



When your sister was baptised, we had a reminder that you and your brother and sister are much "luckier" than that chick. You have a mother and a father to care for you. And you have a whole church-full of people to care for you. God cares for you, Lucas.

And that's the end of the story for today.

I think we'd better throw these egg shells in the compost, so we don't get salmonella, whatever that is.

Curt Gesch is a retired schoolteacher who tries to learn what he can from his small flock of chickens. He says he depises allegory, but comes pretty close in this column.



When thieves broke in

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

I always knew that anyone could break into our house if they really wanted to. After all, it isn't a fortress. But when thieves broke in on Remembrance Day last year, I wasn't prepared for the emotional and spiritual work it would take to rid my heart and mind of the fear that moved in when they moved out.

Everything we experience leaves a "smell" behind itself. When the experience is life-enhancing and positive, the "smell" is a blessed, pleasant fragrance. On the other hand, when the experience is sin-rooted and negative, the "smell" is a stinking reek. The weeks after the break-in, I discovered that the only way I could overcome the stinking reek of the injustice perpetrated against us was with the fragrant love of Christ. As always, in surprising ways God helped me to do that.

Here's how the break-in happened and how I was able to cope with it.

On the evening of Nov. 11, when we returned home from church, my daughter, who had been away all day, looked in her bedroom for her iPod but couldn't find it. My husband I joined in the search, knowing how valuable the tiny music player that she had bought with her hard-earned money was to her. We grew increasingly perturbed when the search proved fruitless. Finally, we gave up and prepared to go to bed.

Minutes later, in the darkened bedroom, I opened the window as was my nighttime habit. To my surprise, my fingers slid straight through the bottom of the screen where it had been carefully sliced along the frame. My stomach lurched. Instantly I knew where the iPod had gone.

"We've been broken into!" I said to Rinke, my husband.

Upon inspecting other window screens, which had also been cut in the same manner, and checking the doors, we realized how the thieves had broken in. We surmised that they'd done so while we were in church that morning. For twelve hours we'd been in our house and hadn't even been aware of the intruders' visit, so cleverly had they covered their tracks.

In shock, we phoned the police. When the police officer arrived, he didn't believe our story because the house had not been vandalized and the only thing that we'd discovered missing was the iPod. In his experience, break-ins usually involved dumped drawers, smashed cabinets, visible chaos, and the theft of many items. Taking my husband and me aside, he told us that some teenagers had staged break-ins into their parents' homes because they'd lost something valuable their parents had given them. They didn't want to endure their parents' anger so they pretended the item had been stolen. I

assured the police officer that his scenario wasn't being played out in our situation, and that my daughter wasn't the kind of kid who would think of cutting screens to fool her parents.

Convinced that the break-in was authentic, the officer called a co-worker who lifted fingerprints from our windows.

After the officers left, we tried to sleep. But the night was long because we were afraid.

The next day I was still afraid. In fact, I didn't want to leave the house to keep an appointment because I didn't know what I'd discover when I returned home. I realized then that I had some emotional and spiritual work to do to combat fear and to keep from becoming crippled by it.

I began with prayer. Throughout the next weeks, I occasionally walked through the house and prayed over each spot where I knew that the intruders had been because those spaces seemed defiled. Was that foolish of me? Perhaps in our Western way of thinking it is. But it didn't seem silly to me at all. In fact, as I reclaimed those spaces for the glory of God, it seemed to me that the stinking reek of injustice receded before the fragrance of Christ.

I also spent time reflecting on God's character and actions, and remembered that "he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you – the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life" (Psalm 121:3a-7). That truth was especially poignant for me each time I shuddered to think that the thieves had been watching our coming and going. They obviously knew our weekly pattern of going to church on Sunday mornings. They watched us in order to harm us.

I fought the creepy feeling that gave me by remembering that at all times someone far greater than them is watching over us for our good. He knows exactly what happened in our house that Sunday morning. Nothing is hidden from his sight. And he will bring the perpetrators of the crime to justice in his own time and way. Thinking about our watchful God, whom the Belgic Confession states is "the overflowing source of all good" (Psalter Hymnal, CRC Publications, 1989, pp. 817), wiped out the stinking reek of wicked actions and replaced it with the fragrance of God's life-giving deeds.

I also stayed tuned to the ways God encouraged me in my distress. Providentially, the day before the break-in, I found the book *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (by Donald B. Kraybill, Steven M. Nolt, and David L. Weaver-Zercher, Jossey-Bass, 2007) at a Mennonite Central Committee conference I attended. The book relates the story of the Oct. 2, 2006 shooting of ten schoolgirls at

See When thieves on p. 15

Ascension

He ascended to where he was before!

Does this offend you?

*What if you see the Son of Man
ascend to where he was before!* John 6:61b, 62

When we speak of the 'Ascension' we should not ignore the fact that Jesus actually *went up*, nor overlook the act of 'his rising into the heavens'.

We must not restrict our reflections to Jesus' 'being' in heaven, but we must with the church of all ages continue to celebrate that Jesus 'ascended' to that place.

We should also remember what Jesus himself said about his ascension, that, (unlike his earlier descent from Heaven), he would once more ascend to the sphere of his glory, where he was before.

We read how Jesus upset the people of Capernaum with a difficult saying when he told them,

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven." [John 6:51]. After this statement, Jesus continued, "Does that bother you? Well then, what will you say when you see me, the Son of Man, ascend to where he was before?"

It is essential that we focus on his first *descending* from heaven and then *returning to* heaven.

Only from the background of his descending from heaven can we understand his returning to heaven in the proper light.

You may now ask what is at issue here; what deeper meaning can be found in this contrast?

Just think of a rescuer jumping into a lake to attempt to save a child who is drowning. When he goes down, he may not come back up. Then, rather than saving the victim, he also drowns. He did not lack compassion, but sadly lacked the ability to save the drowning child.

Our Mediator, too, came down into the mire of our unrighteousness and misery to take a firm hold of us. But the power with which he was able to take us up out of our misery differed greatly from that by which he descended. He was able to come back up carrying us with him in his powerful arms. In triumph he took his Bride, his rightful possession close to his heart.

His going down into our world was an act of compassionate Love, but his return to the realm above was an act of inexhaustible Power.

To *descend* from his heavenly glory and enter the womb of a maiden; to become poverty stricken in this impoverished world, and allow himself to be taunted, despised and falsely accused; to accept suffering even unto the cruelest death — that takes compassion and mercy. That shows a deeply felt desire to save, an enormous love for sinners, a self-denial, and the holy triumph of divine grace for an undeserving humanity.

But *Ascension* is something different! Anyone with enough love, concern, self-denial and compassion can jump into the lake to try and rescue that drowning child. It might be another child, a cripple or the mother. But



Christ and the seven candlesticks by Durer.

who can bring the child back to safety? Only the one who can also get himself out of the water again! That depends not on love or compassion but *strength, power, and enormous competence* to control the water, wind and floodwaters with powerful skilled strokes.

So we need two traits: *compassion* and *power*, and where can these two be found together?

On earth these two often seem to be opposites. The powerful lack compassion, and the person who cares lacks the power.

'The suffering servant' of the Lord is more often the appropriate name for those who serve Jahweh, and in

Buddhists," he began. "My dad had the privilege to preach about the living God and that he is sovereign. It was the first time that a Christian preached in their village. They began to see Christians in a different light, and they see that Christians are a loving people and care for their well-being."

With the Burmese government's decision to open its doors to foreign aid workers, Christians in Myanmar and worldwide believe the door is likely to be opened to them only a short while, not only to save lives, but souls as well.

their attempt to show compassion are cruelly defeated by the strong and mighty. Most of those who dare to fight against the powers of this world perish in the attempt.

They will receive the crown of glory, no doubt about that! Yet they succumbed in the struggle.

We recognize the beauty, the tragedy, or emotional elements in these struggles, but recognizing them does not help the cause much. The Lord God is not directing a grand tragedy. To God the struggle to death is not a game. God's dignity and divine majesty are not revealed because he shows the greatest moral indignation with the affairs of his world.

Instead, he is a God who *saves!* Truly saves! Both body and soul, completely and resolutely. There is no beauty in the apparent defeat of saving love, even as a tragedy. His saving love for us is only truly beautiful when it is *triumphant!*

The Lord is not one who just jumps into the lake. He also knows how to come back up out of the water together with those he meant to save, and then to take them to *where he was before!*

That is why, dear readers, Jesus' return to heaven is so grand and majestic.

For in Jesus we find that inexhaustible power. In him we see the complete triumph. In him we see the gargantuan struggle to rescue, his triumphant success, his rising from the dead, and his ascension and return to *where he was before*.

He triumphed in spite of all opposition: the laws of nature, the physical element and human flesh which he assumed. Everything was moved to work against him, including the misplaced love of his disciples, to prevent him from ascending.

Yet nothing could stop him, for he conquered all!

He ascends to *where he was before*, and that is not all! In his divine omnipotence he takes along with him his whole church, all of those he saved from sin. This includes those who are with him, those who now live, and those still to come. *All* God's children are included.

Look up and see him standing there with all those who are saved cradled in his arms.

Let all the angels praise him!

Let all the martyrs and prophets praise him!

And God the Father crown him with many crown!

Note: This is part of a series of meditations by Abraham Kuyper translated by Jack van Meggelen

Myanmar continued from page 9
of the gospel," he said.

"Most of the people living in the Irrawaddy delta are Karen. Imagine 100,000 Karen die and their churches have spiritual revival. Because of their size it will be revival for the whole country," he said.

David Vunga, director of the Myanmar Center for Church Planting, says the desperate situation is not only stirring revival among Christian churches but also causing Buddhists to open their hearts to the gospel.

"We went to this village with 500 families, all

Festivals

Faith and writing' festivals: Musings from an uninspired writer

Marian Van Til

Every two years since 2000, Calvin College and its English Department have organized and hosted a "Festival of Faith and Writing." Given that Calvin College is not only a Christian college but a Reformed one – and the only one with direct and official ties to the Christian Reformed Church in North America – you could be forgiven if you automatically assume that "faith and writing" means "Christian faith and writing." That's only partly the case.

Besides the inclusion of a few Jewish or Muslim writers (the most visible in the festival's history having been Chaim Potok and Salmon Rushdie), the festival's definition of "Christian" is quite flexible. As well as including active-in-faith evangelical, Reformed and "mainline" Christians, there is always an array of nominal Christians and/or those who grew up in Christian environments, who write about the impact of those environments on themselves but (usually by their own admission) have left their childhood faith behind.

The three-day festival consists of main speakers (writers who are nationally or internationally known), interviews with authors, readings, concerts, film, worship (morning prayer and vespers) and dozens of "concurrent sessions" (small-group sessions/workshops) from which festival-goers could choose up to six a day.

'Limping between two opinions'

I've attended all but one of the five festivals held so far, and in those eight years I admit that I haven't entirely reconciled myself to the organizers' assumptions about what kind of festival of faith and writing a Reformed academic institution like Calvin College should be sponsoring.

I vacillate between two points: between being slightly uncomfortable with including virtually *any* good writer – regardless of worldview and viewpoint – who reveals some faith influences, however vague, in his or her work; and between thinking that the inclusion of such writers is helpful, even wise, and may possibly cause either seriously Christian or seriously searching festival-goers (or both) to think more deeply about the meaning of faith and writing.

Still, I've been a little ambivalent about festival organizers' inviting as speakers world-recognized writers such as, Maya Angelou or Joyce Carol Oates (to name a few of the early invitees), whose writing and speaking reveals them to be, if not post-Christian, then nominally Christian or syncretistic in an unholy combining of thought from Christianity and other faiths (including secularism).

Actually, I have less apprehension about inviting as participants Jewish and Muslim writers who write out of those faith traditions. I and other festival-goers at least have a good idea where they're coming from. However, when famous nominally Christian



Maya Angelou poet, educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, civil-rights activist, producer and director.

writers talk about their approach to faith and writing it usually doesn't take long for them to re-

veal that they are in another universe from that which inhabits the minds of Reformed Christian writers who want their faith to come to bear on their writing; or evangelical writers who want their writing to be a witness to Christ and the Gospel.

This has potential to be perplexing to festival-goers, hundreds of whom are themselves writers or would-be writers, and who are looking to learn from such famous writers how those writers integrate their faith and their writing – so that such festival-goers sitting at experienced authors' feet can, in turn, better integrate their own faith with their own writing.

Thinking things through

On the other hand, being perplexed has at least the potential to lead a person to think through the reasons for being so, which can be a productive and growth-producing exercise, an exercise that should prevent any serious Christian from taking the manner of the intersection of faith and writing for granted. Would I really want to see the festival invite only "orthodox" Christians? Some would assume (and say aloud) that that would be "limiting." I wouldn't say that; surely there's a place for *Christian* writers getting together to discuss how their faith and writing intersect, or how they'd like it to when it doesn't. Sometimes the world is too much with us. But Calvin College's festival organizers have taken another approach.

They justify their inclusionary policy by asserting the following in their festival mission statement:

In recent years, serious religious writing has gained an increasingly significant hearing in the literary world. Of course, not all such writing is done by Christians. Fortunately, the Reformed tradition balances strong confessionality and a hearty confidence in the intellectual freedom afforded by grace. Calvin College is well suited to host a diverse array of writers, perspectives, and beliefs that allow for an earnest search for knowledge of God. In this balance of confessionality and freedom, then, we welcome a wide range of faithful writing, makers, and readers. We wish to locate, celebrate, and encourage serious imaginative writing by Christians of all denominations and communions. We welcome the work of writers in other faith traditions who acknowledge or seek spiritual understanding, grace or transcendence.

That sounds good and generous and hospitable. And the "strong confessionality" of the Reformed tradition grounds us (or should ground us) in biblical principles and a solidly biblical worldview. But against that, the statement "balances" intellectual (and academic) freedom. This makes me ask: What is this Reformed "hearty confidence in the intellectual freedom afforded by grace"?

'Common grace' and free thinking

Most of us Reformed people would agree that we human beings are only truly *free* to think, to be, in fact, when our wisdom is in line with God's. Any other "wisdom" is, in fact, foolishness. Most Christian academic institutions interpret (or at least used to interpret) "academic freedom" as that freedom to explore God's world in a manner consonant with our acknowledging him as our Creator and LORD. And, in Calvin College's case, thus anything espoused as truth should also be consonant with the teachings of the Christian Reformed Church, since it is a "church school."

We would also agree that God has graciously given the human race many gifts in common, including those of intelligence, intellectual ability and writing ability. He has blessed both "the just and the unjust" these gifts (and many others). These gifts and talents given to all humanity flow from his "common grace" to all his human creatures.

That being the case, we should have no problem acknowledging that all of us human beings can and do learn from each other: the whole body of human knowledge is open to us, despite the differing worldviews of all those who have contributed and are contributing to that knowledge, and despite the fact that many of our fellow human creatures have not served and do not serve the God who is LORD of heaven and earth. Perhaps that's why the Festival organizer's say "Calvin College is well suited to host a diverse array of writers, perspectives, and beliefs."

I truncated that sentence. As stated earlier, the rest of it says "[beliefs] that allow for an earnest search for knowledge of God." That "balance between confessionality and freedom" is then the basis on which Calvin College can "welcome a wide range of faithful writing, makers, and readers." Perhaps what they're saying is that, though we confess that *our world belongs to God* we can't expect every guest speaker we invite – even guests who are there to talk about faith and writing – to make that confession.

'Community' and 'religious writing'

The Festival of Faith and Writing describes itself as having started "as an exploration of the communities made and served by religious writing. Over the years, it has become a community itself – a gath-

ering that encourages the many kinds of exchange that religious writing seems to occasion. Our intent is to bring together the different constituencies of this writing – authors, publishers, readers, and academics – for conversation and celebration."

I'm uncomfortable with that particular use of the word "religious," and my point is not a niggling one, I think. This festival is about writing, about *language*, after all, and its impact on faith – or faith's impact on it. The usage of the phrase "religious writing" gives the wrong impression. It's the kind of phrase that people who do not purport to be "religious" (i.e., who are not formally "religious" and therefore think they are of "no faith") use about those of us they see as "religious." And it's a phrase the secular press, say, uses, because so many of its members know so little about faith, and therefore equate "faith" and "religion." I wouldn't expect an informed Christian to use the phrase in the manner the festival statement uses it. Which renews my misgivings about the festival's approach.

I agree, though, that the festival *has* become a community itself, attracting nearly 2000 registrants each time. Many of those registrants find the festival exhilarating. They love meeting with other aspiring writers and gaining inspiration from the semi-famous and famous writers; and practical advice from editors (who are there representing their publishing companies).

I myself have not experienced the festival that way. But don't despair for me. I haven't *really* wanted to, I admit. Being essentially an introvert, at heart I'm not a good conference-goer. (The festival is really a conference, despite its more upbeat name.) While I enjoy running into old acquaintances and meeting new people (which many introverts do not), I rarely develop warm and fuzzy feelings for either speakers or for fellow attendees with whom I find myself in sessions. I imagine most of them are quite nice people; I just don't feel the need to be a part of that kind of temporary "community."

Professional detachment

More than arising from the kind of personality I am, that detachment occurs because I've attended all the festivals as a journalist, and not first of all as a writer there for personal reasons. So I automatically analyze and critique what I hear in a way that many of the people around me don't do and wouldn't want to do. It arises, too, because I work better in settings "where two or three are gathered," not where nations meet (so to speak). Also playing a large role in my detachment is the fact that I stay with friends in Grand Rapids, not overnight on campus or in a motel with many other festival-goers; nor do I usually eat at the campus dining hall – and having meals together, of course, helps create camaraderie.

None of that precludes enjoying or learning from writers I've heard speak or workshops I've attended. In fact, because I am by

Mourning

profession a writer-editor and because my faith is my life, the intersection of faith and writing for me is of utmost importance. So on that issue I will glean what I can where I can.

The festival's offering of a workshop about hymnwriting, for example, was serendipitous to my other profession as a musician and a church-music director in a Lutheran congregation. And of course it too is related to "faith and writing," in this case very specifically Christian faith and a very particular kind of writing. The workshop was called "Hymnwriting as Devotional Poetry." It was led by Mary Louise Bringle, professor, hymnwriter and president-elect of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. I was most interested in that workshop because almost since I could first read I have been a *reader* as well as player and singer of hymns. In fact, reading through the *Psalter Hymnal* kept me busy learning for hour upon hour during church services when I was a child and wasn't quite able to digest our austere minister's 40-minute sermons. I experienced very early the truth of the adage that more theology is acquired from a church's congregational song than from sermons.

Reservations aside

Bringle affirmed that the poetry of good hymn texts, touching as it does both our hearts and imaginations, deepens our faith and our understanding of God. That's certainly how I have experienced hymn poetry all my life. Bringle involved the audience in trying out their own skill at writing a short stanza for which she supplied a tune. Many discovered that hymn-text writing, like other writing genres, takes peculiar talent. Bringle stressed, though (rightly, I think) that hymn-writing is really more craft than art. Hymn poetry obviously serves an important purpose beyond itself as a work of "art."

The workshop made me want to seriously try this kind of writing. I'm a little surprised at myself that, before now, I've never gotten beyond thinking about trying it. I've written a hymn *tune* – just one, to a text on 1 Corinthians 13 by Bert Witvoet, which is published in the hymnal called *Songs of Rejoicing* (Selah Publishing Co.) – but writing hymn music is of course very different than writing texts.

As I already alluded, the festival offered numerous other "concurrent sessions" on a variety of topics which the organizers clearly chose to appeal to a wide range of people. Of those that attracted me, two related to C.S. Lewis ("C.S. Lewis and the Moral Imagination" and "Approaches to C.S. Lewis") and another was about "writing

for faithful readers," i.e., for an audience the writer knows is Christian. Despite the theological-philosophical reservations I outlined above, each Faith & Writing Festival I've attended has included interesting, valuable and even challenging presentations and experiences. And numerous opportunities to spend money on books!

But this year my most memorable experience in Grand Rapids occurred outside the festival itself, albeit nearby.

An unforeseen meeting

On the opening morning of the festival, Baker Book House, which has a large bookstore just down the road from Calvin College, was hosting a talk and signing by Christopher Parkening. For readers unfamiliar with him,



Parkening is the U.S.'s preeminent classical guitarist and is among the handful of best classical guitarists in the world. He is an evangelical Christian and has written an autobiography, *Grace Like a River*, about his conversion and return to faith (he grew up in a Christian home). I own several Parkening recordings that I've listened to over and over, so I was excited to find that I would have the opportunity to hear him speak. (Parkening was in the city primarily to perform with the Grand Rapids Symphony that weekend.)

The night before, an idea had suddenly



I am starting to realize that the pundits who have written that grief is work are correct. It is hard work. I am finding that not only is grief a process but it is a lonely existence. It is solitary work. Even though I was the closest to my wife Marisa during her diagnosis, treatment, struggle and eventual death from cancer, I still didn't know what she went through. Even though I am staying home from work and taking care of our three kids full time, I still don't know what they are going through in losing their wonderful mother. I don't know what my sister-in-laws are going through in losing a sister and friend. I only know what grief has done to me. It is an existence, but lonely and individual.

I recently went to a party where I met an old acquaintance. He hadn't seen me since Marisa had died and when he saw me, he immediately told me that I was going to be okay. I found it to be a curiously quick comment but shook it off and thought that he was right and that I am going to be okay.

An hour later we met up again in another circle of people where the conversation gravitated towards my situation. Again I listened and heard him say to me that I was going to be okay. And again, I thought that he was right. I am going to be okay but I felt it was told to me for not only the second time, but in a dismissive tone.

It then happened for the third time about an hour later. He and I were in yet another conversation with different people when the topic of my situation came up again and he again told me that I was going to be okay and then reminded me publicly that he had told me that already twice.

I explained to him that although the truth is that he is right and that we will be okay, when someone says that I am going to be okay in a flippant manner, it does

occurred to me. I resolved to offer Parkening a copy of my biography of Handel. I knew that the guitarist was a great admirer of Bach, so I thought he might be interested in Handel as well.

In the morning I arrived at the bookstore a little early and was surprised to see very few people there. Parkening was chatting informally with a Baker employee. So I was easily afforded a chance to speak with him and give him my book, which I had signed to him, thanking him for the hours of pleasure he has given me as a listener to his recordings. He seemed genuinely appreciative. He is interested in Handel, he said, but didn't know much about his life, so would be very interested to read about him.

Soon the room filled; people unable to get a chair stood to listen to Parkening. He talked about his journey into the profes-

My window seat

Mendel D. Hoekstra



not honour how difficult it is. When it is said as an avoidance of being uncomfortable, it is better to say nothing. When it is said so quickly and with nearly no taste of lament, it means very little. When it is said with a sense of 'lets move the conversation along', it doesn't honour how difficult grieving is and how difficult it is to lose. And how difficult and lonely it is to find the road back to 'okay'.

I told him I am not looking for pity because I don't need that. But sometimes people who are grieving need lament. Lament and pity are two very different things. I understand that he was uncomfortable. I get that. And I understand that people say things because they are uncomfortable with being uncomfortable because I too am often a victim of that emotion.

I understand that he didn't mean to be hurtful. But that doesn't mean he wasn't.

The birth of a child should and usually is celebrated and honoured. When people are married for 40 or 50 years, there is usually a day or night of honouring that couple and the faithfulness of God. When someone turns 13, the teenage years are often spoken about. When a person retires from a calling that they have spent many years at, there is often a time to honour that person for the years of hard work. Grief should be similar to those milestones. It should be honoured for the difficulty that it brings.

When it comes to grief and the complications that it brings, I don't claim to have the right answers but I do feel that when it comes to suffering, I "misunderstand a little less completely" (CS Lewis).

Mendel D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, ON with his three children.

sional world of music and recording while still a teenager, about having achieved his goal of fame and fortune by the time he was 30; of "retiring" to a ranch in Montana to fly fish (his other love); then of his conversion, marriage and eventual return to performing and recording, the second time around with the conscious purpose of combining his faith and work so that he can be the disciple he knows Christ has called him to be.

When afterwards a questioner asked what he takes along to read when he's on the road, he first mentioned the Bible. And then said that on the rest of this trip he would be reading a biography of Handel which a kind person had just given him. I couldn't help but smile.

I'm pretty sure that by now he has actually read my book. At least, I like to think so.

Corinthians

The order of life and death has been reversed

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:22

A. A. van Ruler

The first thing we notice in Paul's words is the order. Paul is reflecting on the big questions – life and death. We all reflect on these questions at some time in our lives. In fact, there's no end to our questions about what it means that we live for a time and then die.

When Paul proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, he must of course also dwell on these all-encompassing, all-determining ideas. The gospel, too, must address them.

But Paul turns things around. He doesn't speak of life and death, but conversely of death and life. This impacts the tense of the verbs he uses. He doesn't speak of life in the present tense and about death in the future tense. But of death he says that all *die*. This is *the* characteristic of the present. And about life he says that all *will be* made alive. So this is something that has yet to happen. But now we stand in the midst of death, while life is something that is ahead of us.

This reversal, if we allow it to sink in, must give us a start. It is no doubt responsible for some of the impact that the gospel makes on our natural experience of reality. Usually we think: first life, then death. And if we think a bit more deeply: there is a stream of life and there is a stream of death, but essentially it is one continuous stream of life and death. Life and death are, then, two phases, two manifestations of one unfathomable mysterious reality.

Then along comes the gospel to say: Don't let yourself be fooled by appearances. This is reality – death. Life is something that must still be given to us. In this way, our natural reflections are disrupted by the gospel.

Now for something very different – the second thing to strike us in Paul's words. Death and life are both given a central core. Paul connects death with Adam, and he risks the broad assertion that we all die in Adam. Similarly, he also connects life – still to come – with Christ. This will happen in Christ.

Adam and Christ – the two centers of death and of life. To die and to be made alive are both acts of God. God completes these in us. He gives us death and he gives us life, though not arbitrarily and by chance. Nor does he bring them as part of the same endless stream of events. God's acts have fixed historical points in which he has concentrated everything. From these proceed all his dealings with man and the world. In Adam he brings us death and in Christ he brings us life. He sees us in terms of Adam and Christ. He reckons us as being either in Adam or in Christ. This is how he knows us.

This seeing and reckoning and knowing by God is a powerful seeing, reckoning, knowing. It works something out. We either perish in it or we are saved by it.

By nature this way of thinking is strange to us. We often think like heathens in terms of the same ever-changing stream of reality. We see the world in terms of a nature that dies and then come to life again. But Paul thinks in Hebrew terms, that is, in terms of a living, acting God

who has the world in his hands and who does something with it. He sees reality as historical. Therefore, he needs Adam and Christ in order to express what he thinks of death and life. These two huge phenomena can only be understood when they are planted in history – in Adam and in Christ as historical figures.

We need to grow accustomed to this way of thinking if we truly want to experience existence from the viewpoint of the gospel. Only in this way will we retain the third dimension – I mean the third dimension of God and his acts. Reality is not a stream that flows on by itself. It involves actions. Human beings must act. We exist as acting and working beings. Only then are we truly human and not just part of nature, part of the cycles of growth and death. But we can discover this humanity and preserve it when we recognize God as the living, acting God, and when we understand and experience all of reality in terms of his acts.

But this isn't the only thing. There is still another valuable element in Paul's historical analysis of the huge realities of death and life. Death is concentrated in Adam, life in Christ. This implies that

death and life are fixed. In Adam and in Christ decisions were made that are now behind us. They are in a sense irrevocable. We can only be human on the basis of these decisions – acts of God pertaining to our humanity.

Here abyss calls to abyss. Mercy testifies against judgment. In Adam God performed a dreadful deed over toward us. He made us to die.

However, in Christ God performed a very different deed. He makes us alive.

I'm not suggesting here that God trips over himself. But I do believe that a victory happened in God, at least in his acts, that is, in his life-giving act in Christ he overcame his deadly act in Adam. This cost him much labor, struggle, agony – the divine labor of the sacrifice on Golgotha.

We can only view these acts of God with bated breath. Paul stands in the middle proclaiming this great reversal. In Adam all die, he says. But in the same way in Christ all will be made alive.

We need to hear this apostolic gospel and embrace it in faith. Only then will we come clear in our hearts with the big questions of life and death. The "joyful reversal" has happened, and slowly but surely we, too, learn to speak first of death and then, in deeply altered words, of life.

Pictures: Durer Crucifixion and Resurrection



Family

Miracles really do happen every day

Lisa M. Petsche

Nobody likes to wait. Especially for a medical diagnosis and treatment.

That's what my husband and I were doing for the past month.

It started with a routine visit to his family doctor, who didn't like his heart rate. A trip to a hospital emergency room, for a thorough assessment, followed. Signs of heart damage were discovered, suggesting a recent (silent) heart attack. The good news: my husband was in no immediate danger and could go home.

Further medical tests and consultations were booked. Meanwhile, my husband began to experience chest pain. He was prescribed medication and instructed to curtail his activities.

It was hard to remain patient and positive. We both knew all too well the insidious damage heart disease could cause and the tragic outcomes that could result. My father-in-law died prematurely from heart disease, as did a friend of mine who suffered a massive heart attack while jogging.

We were consequently relieved last week to learn that a heart catheterization (angiogram) – the final piece of the diagnostic puzzle – had been scheduled.

The patient education booklet addressed possible risks, including "a 1 in 1000 chance of having a stroke, heart attack needing emergency open heart surgery, or death." With angioplasty (insertion of a balloon catheter to widen an artery), which might also be required, the risk increases to a one in 100 chance. Another worrisome possibility was that my husband might need open heart surgery.

We tried to reassure our children. They knew their grandpa had died of heart surgery complications. And they'd seen their dad make a trip to the emergency room. I encouraged them to pray that the doctor would be able to find and fix whatever was wrong.

Early the next morning my husband and I drove across town to the hospital's Heart Investigation Unit (HIU). We met some patients from out of area and realized just how fortunate we are to have a cardiac care centre in our community.

The nursing staff explained everything that would happen as they prepared my husband for his catheterization. The HIU cardiologist came around to review the risks and obtain written consent. We were reassured to learn he had

lots of experience.

After my husband was wheeled away, I re-located to the waiting room, where several grim-faced groups huddled together. The few people who looked to be my age clearly were offspring of patients, providing support to their other parent. I was by far the youngest spouse in the room.

I settled into a window seat overlooking the hospital entrance, watched the comings and goings, listened to music and sipped coffee. And I prayed.

I felt surprisingly, inexplicably calm.

Time passed faster than I expected. Suddenly a familiar face appeared in front of me. It was one of the nurses, advising me that my husband was on his way to the recovery area.

His report: one coronary artery was found to be narrowed. The doctor was able to correct this through balloon angioplasty and insertion of a stent (a permanent, mesh tube made of metal). My husband could go home the next morning.

Just like that, the crisis was over.

There's a saying that miracles happen every day. When you or a loved one receives a life-saving medical intervention, however routinely it may be performed, you know without a doubt that this is true.

The cardiologist later told us that the artery in question had been almost completely blocked. Total blockage in that particular location causes instant death. The reality is sobering.

So, too, is the diagnosis of coronary artery disease – a serious condition for which my husband will require medication and monitoring for the rest of his life. Lifestyle changes will also be needed, to help prevent another crisis. But we can deal with that.

Looking back, I'm amazed at how well I coped during those five uncertain weeks. I can only attribute my composure to God's "amazing grace," which saved me from debilitating fear.

It would have been easy to panic. After all, the hospital where my husband received his new lease on life is the one where his dad died. On Father's Day.

I can't thank God enough that Father's Day in our family will be a joyful one this year – the best ever.

Lisa M. Petsche is a mother of three and a freelance writer specializing in family life.



My Father

My Dad had died and I, bereft,
Was filled with sorrow when he left.
Although I knew that Dad had gone
To God above and so beyond
My love and care, yet I would talk
And share with him when on a walk.

I told him things I should have said
When still alive and with me yet.
I then would pray and ask my God
To care for him since I could not.
And foolish though that question was
It gave me comfort in my loss.

I constantly conversed with God
And spoke to Him about my lot
That fatherless I could not be.
't Was then that I began to see
That deeper than the love I'd lost
I had received without a cost.

My grief subsided as that thought
The long-desired comfort brought.
God sacrificed His only Son
To pay for wrong that I have done.
Then lovingly adopted me
So that He could my Father be.

Didy Prinzen

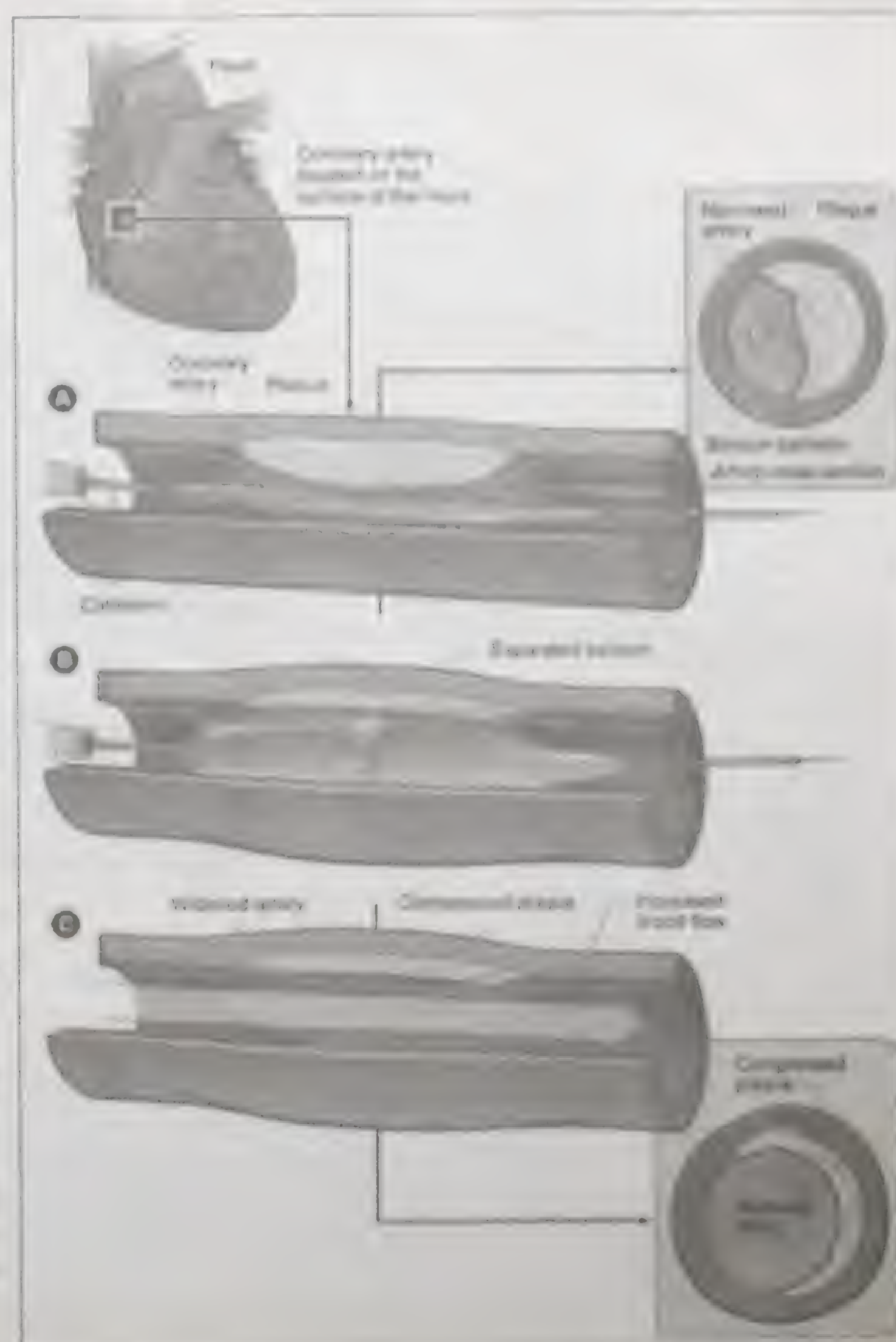


Thieves...continued from p. 10

Nickle Mines, Pa., and the way the Old Order Amish so quickly extended forgiveness to the killer's family. As I read it in the days after the break-in when I was struggling to forgive the thieves, I learned how, for these deeply religious people, forgiveness is "not simply an option but an enduring expectation" (pp. 122). I knew that God expected the same from me. The Christ-like fragrance of the Amish response to

a horrific crime helped me to choose the path of obedient forgiveness in the presence of a lesser evil, and soon I wasn't smelling its stench at all.

Through prayer, reflecting on God's character, and seeing God's provision in a stressful time, I've been able to move on even after fear moved in when the thieves moved out.



Daily bread

Eating
my
words

Angela Bick

Feed my sheep

Last month I wrote about Houston CRC's "World at the Table" dinner. It seemed to me like an innovative way to bring home the reality of world hunger. My dad, however, told me later that he'd organized exactly the same sort of dinner through Citizens for Public Justice over thirty years ago. Not only that, but he can recall discussions and articles about fair trade coffee, too, another issue that was recently raised in this column.

I confess to deflating slightly upon hearing this. It was not because my topics were old news, but because it felt like the news must not be getting through. Has nothing changed in thirty years? What does it take to effect real, lasting change? I don't know if it is possible to conquer a problem like world hunger in one generation, but it *should* be possible to pass on knowledge and tactics for raising awareness. That feels like the least we can do. Thankfully, through the availability of the internet and various literatures, I think that opportunities for education today are greater than ever.

What the world eats

I've traveled the globe in the past few days – not literally, but in the pages of a new book: *Hungry Planet*. Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio, its authors, photographed the sum total of what 30 families around the world ate and drank in the space of a week. Even more vividly than the Unlucky Potlucks, *Hungry Planet* "reveals the central paradox of hunger – that there is enough food on Earth to feed everyone, but distribution and access remain highly inequitable" as Dave Toyen, World Vision president, says.

In one photo, the Australian Molloy family stand behind an outdoor table loaded with glistening fruits and vegetables, prepared meats, and various brightly coloured packages. The bill for this fare is \$303 USD. In a rather different pose, the Ayme family of Ecuador sits in a circle around several burlap bags of potatoes, broken rice grains, and coarse flour. They have fresh vegetables and a pile of plantains, but no meat, fish, eggs, or beverages; here, the total cost is \$31 USD.

Even more striking than the food, perhaps, is the setting for each shot. The Molloy family seem dwarfed by the mound of food in front of the four of them. There's an in-ground swimming pool in the background. The Aymes, in stark contrast, sit or squat on a straw-covered dirt floor – all eleven of them.

After paging through *Hungry Planet*, which includes essays on each family's health and lifestyle, it is clear that each extreme has drawbacks. It reminded me of how, in the Old Testament, Agur the oracle petitioned God for sufficiency. "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread" (Prov. 30:8 NIV). *The Message* explains a little further: "Give me enough food to live on, neither too much or too little. If I'm too full, I might get independent, saying, 'God, who needs him?' If I'm poor, I might steal and dishonor the name of my God" (vs. 8-9).

It's interesting that in the Lord's Prayer this request becomes plural. Matthew writes "Give us today our daily bread" (6:11), and in Luke it says "Give us each day our daily bread" (11:3). It sounds redundant to ask for daily bread today, but it does emphasize sufficiency. Give, O Lord, neither too much nor too little to any one of us on this earth.

Maybe I'm naïve, but I think that change is coming. Perhaps our understanding of issues such as fair trade coffee



needed time to grow, even to falter, before taking root. But I think it is taking root now, at least according to a man I met at the library yesterday.

Grounds for change

Bob Jowett has a strong British accent and a helpful perspective on the history of the fair trade movement. Before moving to Canada, he witnessed a long period of inactivity in England, when people seemed reluctant to change buying patterns to favour fair trade. A few years ago, however, fair trade exchanges shot up dramatically, and now he says it is part of everyone's consciousness, and not just in terms of

coffee, but also for tea, chocolate, and bananas.

He thinks the Canadian fair trade movement is on the brink of similar exponential growth. The Barrie Public Library, for example, offers fair trade coffee. Thanks to efforts of Jowett and others, so does the arts symphony, a local Toyota dealer, four public schools, and Georgian College. The Anglican and United Churches in Barrie provide fair trade coffee, and a Catholic church not only serves but sells it to parishioners. Jowett is even working with city council to make Barrie the first fair trade city in Canada, which means that all its businesses would be encouraged to join the fair trade market. These changes have not happened overnight, but – as in England – took time and needed nurturing.

Over the past year, our small group at church studied Peter's life. We read about his calling, his travels, the miracles he witnessed and the miracles he performed. We watched his belief grow, falter, take root and then steady the early church. When Jesus appears to the disciples after his death, he asks Peter to confirm his love three times. Peter doesn't seem to catch, at least not then, that each affirmation replaces one of his eleventh-hour denials. "Lord," says Peter, "you know that I love you." And each time, Jesus responds with "then feed my sheep." He didn't expect Peter to be perfect, only to try.

Bread and Loved Ones

I got a letter from my Oma a few months ago. "Dear Loved Once," it began. If I had to write a letter in my second language, I'd make exactly the same sort of mistake, and probably worse. It made me smile. We are not "loved once" – we are God's children for always; and we don't have to change everything all at once. Thank God for the bread we were given today, and the chance to share it with a few Loved Ones.

Oma's raisin bread in tube pan

2 cups white flour
2 cups whole wheat flour
3 Tbsp. quick-rising yeast
1 tsp. salt
½ tsp. cinnamon
1 cup raisins

Sift dry ingredients together.

1 Tbsp honey

Mix honey with some hot water, then add 2 cups lukewarm water to the dry mixture, stirring it slowly.

It's not a stiff mixture – kind of sloppy.

Set bowl aside, covered with a tea towel (dipped in hot water).

Let rise about 45 minutes, beat down, and let rise again.

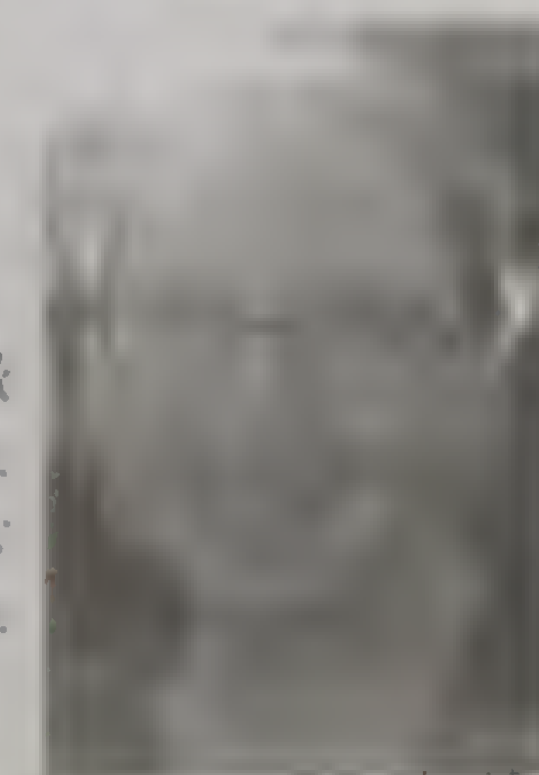
After another hour, beat down and pour in buttered tube pan.

Bake at 350 for one hour. Voila!

Very good with cheese.

Angela Reitsma Bick
lives in Barrie, Ontario.

Send your interesting stories or recipes to:
al_anghick@hotmail.com.



Note: Pictures from the book *Hungry Planet*.

Reflections



Welcome to my perch
Bert Witvoet

Youth rally in rural Limpopo

Alice and I are back from an eight-week stay in South Africa. This is the second time that we have traveled to this

beautiful part of God's world that is, nevertheless, under a lot of strain. While we were there, riots, burning and killings in Johannesburg had erupted in response to the presence of five million refugees in a country of 50 million with a 40 percent rate of unemployment. Where we were, in the northern province of Limpopo (the former Transvaal), the conditions were peaceful. Under the sponsorship of Worldwide Christian Schools and with the financial support of generous friends, we were able to visit Christian schools, and give workshops to boards, educators and young people. In this column I describe how I spent Freedom Day, April 28, with a small group of young people and their youth elder, Wilson Mandende.

The road that led to the little country church was full of potholes and deep ruts. When Wilson Mandende, Patrick Masia and I came to the small concrete one-room meeting place, I saw five women sitting on chairs in the yard, eating *milie pap*, a kind of corn porridge that is stiff enough to be held in clumps between your fingers, dipped in a tomato-based sauce, along with cabbage salad and cooked chicken – standard fare among the blacks in South Africa, morning, noon and evening. It didn't right away dawn on me why they were there, until I saw pots with similar food sitting on a table inside the church. These ladies had come to church early to prepare lunch for the youth group.

But where were the young people? It was 10 in the morning, and Wilson had told me that the rally would be on at 10. But the building was empty, and no young person was in sight. We had passed a cluster of youth hanging out at an intersection minutes earlier, but I had no reason to think they would be part of my audience that day. They seemed to be in no hurry to go anywhere. I poked around the outside of the church, and, seeing no urinal anywhere, I relieved myself in the field out front.

Small beginnings

It was a gorgeous day. It was Freedom day, a public holiday in South Africa. Wilson, Patrick and I dragged a few plastic chairs outside and chatted about the fact that this building represented the mother church of five other black Reformed congregations, and that Wilson had come back to this congregation after having served as elder in some of the other churches for almost 20 years. This gathering of young people that day was a first in the life of this church. I wondered whether this "first" was going to amount to anything, until I saw half a dozen young people saunter our way on the dirt road leading to the church. Ah, they must have been that group I had seen earlier. It was close to 11 a.m. when the chairperson, a young woman, called the meeting to order.

By that time 17 young people had deposited themselves on the wooden backless benches that formed the only church furniture apart from a simple lectern. This was a youth rally? This was a church hall? My mind went back to Notre Dame Cathedral that Alice and I had visited a few weeks earlier during our stopover in Paris. I tried to figure out how many of these adobe-plastered "shacks" would fit in the humongous sanctuary that stands next to the Seine River. But was this sparse and simple one-room church less



of a sanctuary than the Gothic giant named after Mary, the mother of Jesus? The organizers had wanted young people from other congregations to attend, but somehow the communication had been lost or passed on too late. So, instead of the 30 young people I had been promised, there were only 17. But what a fine group of young persons they turned out to be.

The group soon started singing. It didn't take long before their enthusiastic voices filled the room with as much authority as a mass choir under the baton of Leendert Kooy in Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto. These African youth don't seem bothered by self-consciousness when it comes to singing. Usually one person leads with strong introductory and bridging musical phrases, and the others join in with the main lines of the song. And they always move their bodies to the music or clap along. It's catchy, and I find myself moving and dancing along to what I hope will be a worshipful response to the greater glory of God.

Faithfulness

My topic for the first workshop was the concept of faithfulness as it applies to marriage. I explained what the difference is between marriage as a contract and marriage as a covenant. Marriage as a contract is a legal agreement between two people. Marriage as a covenant is a spiritual agreement between three parties: God, a man and a woman. Marriage as a contract can be broken through a legal process. Marriage as a covenant may never be broken.

The talk eventually turned towards the "do not be unequally yoked" message that can be found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 6:14). I pointed out that this passage was based on a statute announced in Deuteronomy 22:10. Moses gave the following common-sense instruction to the people of Israel: "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey."

I asked Wilson Mandende to stand next to me. I placed a broomstick over our shoulders as if it were a yoke. I told the group that Wilson was the ox and I was the donkey. Loud laughter erupted. Wilson caught onto the point I was trying to make and started pulling ahead while I held back. "Why is this not a suitable match-up?" I asked. Someone said that the ox is much stronger than the donkey, so they don't make a good team. Someone else pointed out that a donkey tends to be stubborn while the ox is usually compliant. "With that kind of match-up the farmer cannot plow a straight and even furrow,"

I said. "The uneven pressure put on the yoke can also break the plow."

I then took those ideas to a situation in which one of the marriage partners is a believer and the other, an unbeliever. A believer is strong spiritually, and an unbeliever is not. A believer is compliant when it comes to God's commandments, but an unbeliever can be stubborn and resist doing God's will. Such a partnership cannot build a stable and nurturing household, and the marriage may break up as a result. The young people responded with several questions. "What if I fall in love with an unbeliever?" "Is it wrong to have more than one wife?" "Can an unbelieving spouse not become a Christian through my influence and prayers?"

False gods

The second talk dealt with idolatry. It, too, was well responded to. One young woman asked what she should do about ancestor worship. Her parents and grandparents pray to ancestors. She is the only one in the family who doesn't pray to ancestors because she wants to worship only God. Another young man told us that he has a large poster of Zuma, the new leader of the ANC party, hanging in his bedroom. Every morning, as he wakes up, the first thing he says is, "Good morning Zuma." Was that wrong? he wanted to know. Was that idolatry? It struck me how the African context is so different from the one our young people in Canada encounter.

Later on I reflected on the "youth rally." Everything that had taken place was on a small scale: the building, the size of the "rally," the lack of resources, my own limited knowledge. But my heart was glad. It had been a good day. I felt inspired by the enthusiastic singing, warmed by the dedication of the five women who had cooked our food, uplifted by the willingness of these young people to spend a holiday listening to a white person from Canada, supported by youth elder Wilson Mandende.

Cultural gaps

Right after the closing of the rally, Wilson took me to the house of a woman who a few days earlier had lost her husband. She was a member of Wilson's congregation. A large tent had been set up in the front yard. At six p.m. about a hundred people showed up to pray and sing. This happens every other day that week until the body is finally laid to rest. Funerals in South Africa usually take place on Saturdays so that relatives can all attend. I was asked to give a short meditation, even though the pastor, Rev. Norman Ligege, was sitting next to me. The widow stayed inside, however.

Afterwards we went inside the house to visit the widow. She was sitting on a mattress on the floor, wearing a T-shirt that had Oakland Raiders written on it (talk about incongruity!). She never looked up, except when, upon our leaving, I spoke to her in English and she saw a white hand reach-

See Youth rally on p. 18



valentine

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Rising in the world

On buying a mattress

Berta Hosmar

Our forefathers must have slept peacefully on their straw or feather mattresses for generations, but nowadays we demand more comfort in our bedrooms.

Yet we had no idea that buying a new mattress could be so complicated.

No wonder, we had not bought a new one for our double bed for more than fifteen years and, if my memory serves me correctly, we just went to the store that time, picked one out quickly and had it delivered the next day. End of story.

But lately we noticed that this mattress was sagging and gave us back and shoulder pains.

A son, who lives several hundreds of kilometers away from us and occasionally comes to visit with his family, and who is then generously given the use of our bedroom, had already complained several times.

"Mom, dad, you need a new mattress, how can you stand sleeping on this old thing any longer?"

I decided to start shopping on my own and one rainy afternoon I visited a well-known store, directed by the annoying jingle that has played on the radio hundreds of times: "Sleep Country Canada, why buy a mattress anywhere else?"

A strange sight greeted me upon entering the store.

Right in front of the large front window a couple was reclining on a bed, side by side. The lady wore sunglasses, probably to protect her eyes from the glaring overhead lights, the man stared silently at the ceiling.

For a moment I thought they were life-size dolls, until the man moved slightly and sighed deeply.

The lady turned, and without a word, continued to rest on her side.

Our daughter had prepared us that before buying a mattress you had to try out several, and that it was common practice to take off your shoes and spend an hour or so at the store, hopping from one bed to another so you could find the most comfortable mattress. That must be what this couple was doing. I heard some giggling at the back of the store and noticed that two young kids were

also doing just that. Nobody stopped them and I assumed they belonged to the silent couple on the bed and that the staff, hoping to make a sale, let them have their fun.

A young salesman approached me and I told him that we wanted to switch from a double bed to a queen-size one, and that we needed a new frame and a new set of mattresses.

We already had a queen-size headboard.

The salesman's enthusiasm knew no bounds. He treated me to a torrent of words and explained that one mattress was as different from another as vanilla ice cream was from chocolate ice cream.

"They both taste delicious, both serve their purpose by giving you joy and delight, just like a mattress should, yet chocolate is not vanilla.... So it is with a mattress. Some cure sore backs, others eliminate painful shoulders, and if you happen to sleep on your stomach you need yet another model," he stated.

He briefly stopped talking by jumping from one bed to another, and demonstrating the different beds and their virtues by stretching out on his back, his stomach and his sides, while discreetly mentioning the price of each item.

When he started mentioning ice cream again I was completely overwhelmed and felt slightly dizzy.

I told him I would be back later.

This time our daughter who had recently bought a mattress and thus had experience came along, and so did my husband.

We were invited to try out several beds, and while our daughter discussed business with an older salesman we settled into the routine of stretching out on various mattresses and looking at the ceiling from different areas of the store.

We found one we really liked and took our time trying it out.

"Look at that spider on the ceiling," I remarked dreamily, turning to my husband, who just then let out a soft snore.

That proved that this was the mattress we could be happy with.

Our daughter told us that we would get a low-profile frame and under mattress and we eagerly awaited the delivery of our purchase.

A week later two delivery men started working diligently in our bedroom, fastening the headboard to a larger frame and gently piling on the two mattresses.

We knew that today's mattresses are a lot thicker than the ones we had bought many years ago, but seeing the new bed left us shocked and speechless.

It was about 8 cm. wider and longer than our other bed had been but that was O.K. with us. What was not O.K. was the height of this new bed. It dominated our rather small bedroom like a throne. We literally had to climb into it. We tried hard to like it, and reassured ourselves that we would probably get used to it.

"We are this much closer to heaven," I joked feebly while looking at the ceiling which was now much closer to our bodies.

Yet I did not feel safe at all sleeping on this bed and I was afraid we might fall out during the night and hurt ourselves.

Our daughter-in-law and granddaughter came the next day to have a look at it.

"Oh my goodness!" was Angela's stunned reaction but Emily loved it.

"Look, opa and oma, you just start running in the hall and when you get to the bedroom and the bed you just jump, like I do!" And she demonstrated a leap that looked a little like a sky dive.

I had visions of my husband and I sprinting down the hall every night to get into bed, but then our daughter-in-law discovered that we had a regular frame and mattress, and not the low-profile ones we had ordered. Well, with our limited knowledge of beds, how were we supposed to know?

The salesman readily admitted that he had made a mistake and a few days later, after the exchanges were made, we finally enjoyed our comfortable, much closer to the floor, purchase.

Youth rally... continued from p. 17

ing out to her. What was going through her mind? What right do I have to be here in the intimacy of her mourning? I wondered. (Two days later, Alice and would be at the deathbed of the great-grandmother of a principal we know. The woman was estimated to be about 120 years old. I was asked to say a prayer.) But let me go back to the bedroom of the widow. Rev. Ligege prayed and spoke. It was all done in the Venda tongue. I was told later that he had rebuked the relatives for oppressing the widow so that she stayed in bed. They had blamed her for her husband's death.

This blaming of the wife is, apparently, not an uncommon phenomenon within the tribal societies of South Africa. When I mentioned this practice to a group of school board members several weeks later, one woman said it had happened to her. Unbeknownst to her, her husband had taken to himself a girlfriend or a second wife in the city, and, with the help of complicated explanations, he would visit her on holidays. It was during one of those visits that he was assaulted and killed by strangers. His relatives concluded that his wife had ordered the killing. This accusation made life miserable for her. It's usually the women on the husband's side who make life difficult for the surviving spouse. Sometimes this blaming is motivated by jealousy because the husband's possessions now go to the woman. And mothers-in-law have more power over the daughter-in-law and her family when the husband is alive.

Again the African context showed itself and made me

realize that there is a large cultural gap between myself and these people who so warmly accepted me in their midst. But the amazing thing is that the Word of God penetrates all cultures and is able to set right what so easily becomes crooked. I wonder what it is we in Canada do to widows in our midst that needs correction.

Freedom for all

Maybe you wonder how I answered the two young people who had asked about ancestor worship and greeting Zuma in the morning? I answered them in a kind of question and answer way. I wanted to involve the young people in their own search for an answer. I praised the young woman for being faithful in the midst of her family's ancestor worship. I suggested that she be very cautious about helping her family see what's wrong with ancestor worship. These are her parents and grandparents, and, especially in the African context, you have to show a lot of respect for them. We talked about the fact that we can thankfully remember our ancestors, but we know that they have no power beyond the grave to assist us. Only God must be worshiped. There may come an appropriate time that she can share her convictions with her family, but her life is to be her main testimony.

As for the poster of Zuma and the early-morning greeting, I asked the young man why he admired this controversial politician, whose morals are suspect and whose political ambitions are expressed in the slogan "Bring Me

My Machine-gun." Zuma is not exactly known as a spiritual giant. Would it not be better if the young man started the day by greeting God or Jesus? Someone else in the room found it necessary to give him a stronger form of disapproval. The young man's reply was disarming: "This is the first time that I learn about idolatry." In other words, please don't rebuke me or ridicule me. I thanked him for his honesty and encouraged him to seek God's way in these things.

It had been quite a day for me, this Freedom Day. The event commemorates the day the first non-racial democratic elections were held in 1994. I hadn't exactly focused on political freedom with my talks and meditation. But "freedom" is a wide-ranging concept. All of us are bound by something that keeps us from fully living out the liberation that God wants us to experience. In the case of our South African friends, it can be the traditions and superstitions that enslave. In the case of Western Christians it can be the materialism or individualism that often accompanies prosperity.

Faithfulness in marriage and faithfulness in worship, the two topics I had broached in my talks, do set us free. In that unexpected way, I had observed Freedom Day.

Bert Witvoet is the former editor of CC, now retired, who stays active by editing the Christian Educators Journal and preaching the occasional sermon



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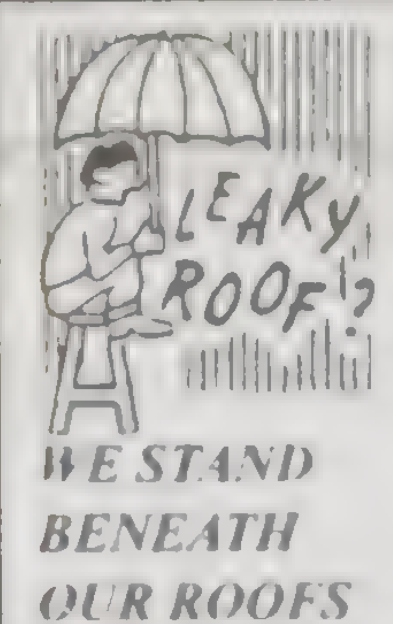
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Classifieds

Ordination Anniversary		Obituaries	
<p>July 4, 1943</p> <p>We thank God for the + since the ordination of his servant</p> <p>Bastiaan Nederlof</p> <p>as minister of the word on July 4, 1943</p> <p>He was privileged to serve with joy in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk Eindhoven and Dokkum and in the Christian Reformed Church Houston, B.C. Edmonton, Alberta Bellflower, California Vancouver, B.C. Hamilton, Ontario and Victoria, British Columbia</p> <p>He has been a blessing to many.</p> <p>Roely Nederlof Nancy Nederlof Elsy TerMaat Richard Lawlslo Nederlof Theo Nederlof</p> <p>Reception: Saturday, June 28, 2008, 3 – 5 p.m. First CRC, Vancouver, 2670 Victoria Drive, Vancouver, B.C.</p> <p>Contact: 808-3755 McGill Street Burnaby BC V5C 1M2</p>	<p>July 4, 2008</p> <p>WIEBRAND (Bill) VANHUIZEN</p> <p>went home to be with his Lord and Savior in his 82nd year on Monday May 12, 2008</p> <p>Beloved husband of Jantje (Janny) vanHuizen nee vanDijk Loving father and Opa of John & Beverley vanHuizen Samuel, Katelynn, Benjamin Harvey & Jacqueline vanHuizen Ryan, Lauren, Alexandra, Hayley Hilda & John Olbach Henry, Eric, Luke, Simon, Christopher Dear brother of Gerrit, the late Fokje, the late Barbara, Herman, Albert, Renske, Grietje, Jan, Sietse and Nico</p> <p>Funeral Services were held at the Essex Christian Reformed Church in Essex on Friday May 16, 2008 at 11 a.m.</p> <p>Correspondence: Jantje vanHuizen, 10 - 209 Irwin Ave Essex ON N8M 2T5</p>	<p>JOHN G. HOFLAND</p> <p>Passed away peacefully at his home in Mississauga surrounded by his family on Sunday, June 8, 2008 in his 77th year</p> <p>Beloved husband of Hendrika Dear father of Joan and Bob Havenaar Mary and George Venema Frank and Marg Hofland Nancy and Ken Tamminga John and Linda Hofland Glenn and Joan Hofland Rodney and Alison Hofland</p> <p>Remembered with much love by his 21 grandchildren and 1 great-granddaughter.</p> <p>He is also survived by his 3 brothers and their wives: Bill and Truus Jack and Eleanor Frank and Joyce</p> <p>He will be sadly missed by many relatives in Holland.</p> <p>Correspondence: Hendrika Hofland 90-1405 Lorne Park Rd Mississauga ON L5H 3B2</p>	<p>Warns, Fr. the Neth. Sept 26, 1924</p> <p>Nestleton, Ont. May 15, 2008</p> <p>CLARENCE (Klaas) BAJEMA</p> <p>Passed into the waiting arms of Jesus after a lengthy illness</p> <p>Dearly beloved husband of Grace (Grietje) (nee Albada) for 57 years Loving father of: Marilyn, Andy and AnnJulia (Pete) Loving grandfather of: Michelle (Pat), Jeff (Cen) and Jeremy (Miranda) Loved brother of: Wilda & Gerard (†) Hammie (†) & Anton (†) Liskje (†) Hillie</p> <p>Dear brother-in-law of Leffert (†) & Rinkje (†) Willem & Hannie Bauke & Sjoerdtye Hendrik (†) Rein & Jo (†) Joltje & Wopke Sam (†) & Gwen Marie</p> <p>Funeral service was held May 21, 2008 at Hope Christian Reformed Church. Pastor Norm Sennema officiated</p> <p>Correspondence: Mrs G. Bajema 4340 Malcolm Rd RR 1 Nestleton ON L0B 1L0</p>
<p>Anniversaries</p>			
<p>July 1, 1943</p> <p>With thankfulness and praise to God, we as four generations hope to celebrate 65 years of marriage between</p> <p>BASTIAAN NEDERLOF and ROELY NEDERLOF-VELEMA</p> <p>We thank God for the many years he has given us to love and enjoy our ever growing family circle.</p> <p>Parents: Bastiaan and Roely Nederlof Children: Nancy and Bob Elsy and Rich Rick Theo and Debbie</p> <p>Grandchildren: Rochelle and Stefan, Erk, Anna, Krista, April, Sara and Brent, Katie, Kyle, Branna.</p> <p>Great-grandchildren: Eline, Noah, Joshua, Hanna</p> <p>Reception: Saturday, June 28, 2008, 3 – 5 p.m. First CRC, Vancouver, 2670 Victoria Drive, Vancouver, B.C.</p> <p>Contact: 808-3755 McGill Street, Burnaby BC V5C 1M2</p>	<p>July 1, 2008</p> <p>During the morning of June 4th the Lord called our dear Mother home to her Heavenly Father. We give thanks to God for her great love for her family and for all whose lives she was privileged to touch. We will miss her yet we celebrate her life as a testimony of God's constant grace and abiding love. Mom exempli- fied for us the Christian life – a model we all do well to follow. We miss you Mom and desire to one day meet you again.</p> <p>With love, Your children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren: Rick and Edith, 519-620-2241 Roberta and Joshua Vnesema – Eric and Karryne Gerald and Cheryl – Samuel and Helena Simon Curtis Jake DeGraaf and Sylvie Hurtubise, 905-280-0992 Virginnia and Tavi Stephanie Ian Lawrence and Helen, 905-945-2128 Came and Brad Heidbuurt – Alanna, Jason, Josiah Ryan and Annabela – Sophia David and Kari Jason and Josie Moesker Don and Chris, 905-354-2954 Melissa and Glen Sparks – Grace Laura Diane and Henry Hultink 905-563-3116 Sharon Darlene Lambert and Maureen, 905-562-4908 Kristen and Bill Brouwer Leanne Samantha Michael Erin Lenny DeGraaf, 905-562-9954</p> <p>Predeceased by her parents and husband Geale, sister Frouke, brother Douwe and sister Dirkje. Also survived by her sister Nelly Buursema (Grijp- skerck, Netherlands)</p>	<p>Nieuwkoop, Holland Phelpston, Ontario</p> <p>God called home his child, our father and Opa</p> <p>JOHN KAPTEYN</p> <p>July 5, 1918 May 16, 2008</p> <p>Husband of the late Anna vander Kraan Father of Mary and Rene Schoenmaker Michelle and Sid Slood Dennis Schoenmaker and Renate Faber Jennifer and Curtis Horlings Cor and Ricki Kapteyn John and Tammy Kapteyn Corinna and Andreas Ljungberg David and Rachel Kapteyn Nellie and Ed Eisses Christine and Darrell Buys Michael and Jen Eisses Darren and Christine Eisses Paul and Kathy Kapteyn Aleasha Lorra and Kris Eacott (engaged) Betty-Ann and Michael Boss Anna-Marie Deena Mikaela Peter and Michele Kapteyn Nathaniel Nicole Kelsey And opa to 21 great-grandchildren</p> <p>Correspondence could be sent to: Mary Schoenmaker 5 Victoria Street West Cookstown ON L0L 1L0</p>	<p>JANNETTE GROOT (nee Jonker)</p> <p>of Barrie, Ontario</p> <p>It is with great sadness that we announce the peaceful passing of our loving stepmother, oma and great-oma into the arms of her Savior on Wednesday, May 21, 2008 in her 99th year.</p> <p>Beloved wife of the late Harmen Groot (1980) Dear stepmother of: Nell and Albert VanderHorst Keith and Tina Groot John († 1994) and Margaret Groot-McLaren Peter and Gwenda Groot Elisabeth Macht Joe and Alice Groot</p> <p>Loving Oma of 22 grandchildren and 34 great-grandchildren.</p> <p>The funeral services took place in Barrie at the First Christian Reformed Church on Friday, May 23, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. with Pastor Jack Vos officiating.</p>
<p>God has granted</p> <p>JIM AND BARB TAMMING (nee Doek)</p> <p>50 years of marriage June 18, 1958 - June 18, 2008</p> <p>May God continue to bless you with joy. With love: your children and grandchildren.</p> <p>An Open House will be held on July 5, 2008 from 2-4 at the Lions Club Hall, 432 Albert St, Strathroy ON.</p> <p>Home address: 277 Head St N, Strathroy ON N7G 2J8</p>			
<p>Personal</p> <p>Woman in Toronto area would like to meet gentle- man between 60 and 66 years old, for friendship or companionship (marriage not excluded). Interests or hobbies are walking, swimming, reading, theatre, concerts, family and friends. Reply to File #2762 c/o Christian Courier 5 Joanna Dr., St. Catharines, ON L2N 1C1</p>	<p>For Rent</p> <p>SHARED ACCOMODATION- Niagara Falls One or two bedrooms on main floor or basement bedroom. Parking, laundry. 500+ utilities. Female student or young professional. Close to Brock U and Niagara College, bus route & QEW. Non Smok- ing, no pets. Available immediately. Call 905 353 1958</p> <p>St. Catharines – Room in shared house with other young adults. Ideal for students. Close to QEW, Fairview Mall and on bus route. 350/mo inclusive. Phone 905-937-3314</p>	<p>Vacation Rentals</p> <p>For rent, by weekend or week 2+1 Br. Bungalow in beautiful Grimsby Ontario – gateway to Niagara and the heart of wine country. Close to Niagara Falls, St. Lawrence Seaway, one hour to Toronto. Call 1- 905-309-2268 or E-mail colyn@sympatico.ca</p> <p>Holiday in Holland Beautiful self-contained cottage in Friesland. www.chestnutlane.nl</p>	<p>DUTCH SERVICE</p> <p>will be held July 6, 2008 in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.</p> <p>Fight poverty! Send a cheque "Sea to Sea Bike Tour" to Herb Goodhoofd 1114 Berkshire Court Oakville, Ontario L6M 2L6</p>

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Spreker: Rev. Carl D. Tuyl.
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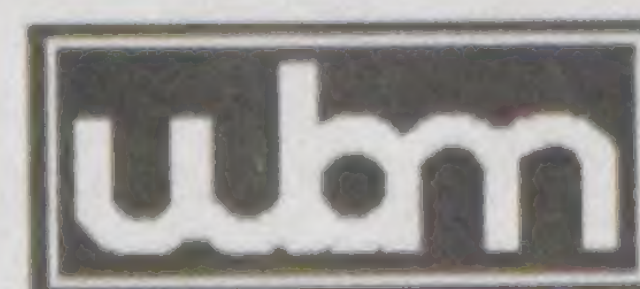
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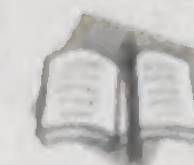
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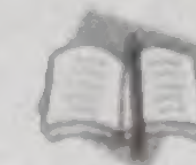
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - 2008

- June 11** Hollandse Dag, 10 am, at the **Moorefield** community centre. For more information contact Hilbert Rumph at 519-638-2053 or see ad in this issue.
- June 18** Hollandse Dag 10:00 Am at First Christian Reformed Church, 310 Kingscourt Ave. **Kingston**. Spreker: Rev. Carl D. Tuyl. For info call (613) 546-5615
- June 19** Noon Hour Organ Recital featuring Stephanie Burgoyne (Music Director St. Jude's Anglican Church, Brantford) and William Vandertuin (Solo and Organ four hands) at Trinity Anglican Church, **Cambridge**. 12.15 p.m. (wvan08@rogers.com)
- June 21, 22** All Nations CRC anniversary celebrations. **Halifax**, NS The celebration begins 6 p.m. June 21 with a traditional All Nations Potluck, followed by a variety show. On Sunday we will have a special worship service at 10 a.m., which will be followed by a picnic. We would love to see past members and old friends again – email info@allnationscrc.org or call 902-429-7136. See ads in previous issues.
- July 1** Frisian Picnic at the Pinehurst Lake Conservation area, **Paris**, ON 11 am. Contact fryskedei@hotmail.com
- July 6** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.
- Nov 8** Trillium League Reunion (years 1975-1982) 4-9 pm at Community CRC, **Kitchener**. For details contact Phia at phia@sympatico.ca or 519-699-5942 or go to www.trilliumleaguereunion.com

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For details go to www.trilliumleaguereunion.com

Questions? Contact Phia (Hoogendoorn) Howes at phia@sympatico.ca or call 519-699-5942

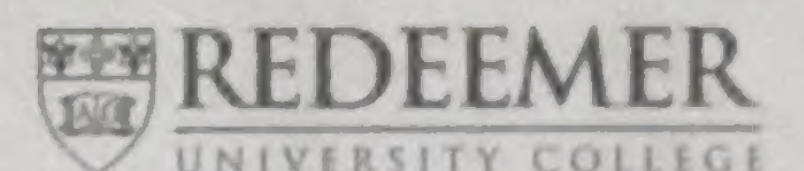
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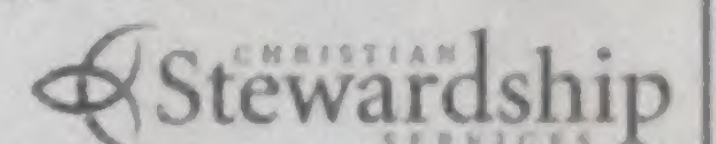
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News

Food crisis softens resistance to genetically modified (GM) food



Ban Ki Moon, the UN secretary-general, says food production must rise by 50 per cent in the next 20 years to feed the world



Yasuo Fukuda, the Prime Minister of Japan, said that in some places producing biofuels was being prioritised above producing food



Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil, says that Brazil's sugar-based biofuels are much more sustainable than America's corn-based products

Robert Marquand

Opposition to genetically modified (GM) foods, still strongest in Europe, is starting to erode in the face of the global food crisis.

But the pressure for change, so far, is more economic than political.

Indeed, it was the political fighting over biofuels, farm subsidies, and trade policies, that threatened to undermine the efforts of 40 world leaders seeking a solution to soaring food costs at a UN summit in Rome that ended Thursday, June 5.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) asked governments to provide at least \$20 billion a year to revive world agriculture research, to help feed nearly 1 billion hungry people, and to spark a new "green revolution." But what advocates describe as a promising solution to hunger – GM foods – did not get much play in Rome, save its promotion by US Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer.

Partly this is because genetically modified crops are not regarded as an immediate answer to farming problems in poor regions; partly it is because genetic alteration remains controversial. Europe bans most of the use and growth of crops whose seeds have been modified with genes of other organisms to make them more resilient.

Yet the economics of the food crisis may already be forcing changes in Europe, and in smaller farm nations, experts say. For the first time, Japan and Korea are allowing snack and drink manufacturers to quietly start using GM corn, after prices for non-GM corn doubled last year.

In Europe, growing numbers of farmers and corporations (such as BASF in Germany, which has a genetic potato ready to introduce) are pushing the European Union – including threats of legal action – to ease restrictions on using GM produce.

Legislators in France, Europe's No. 1 farming nation, nearly came to blows May 22, when a bill to allow GM crops passed by a single vote; yet France will now only allow GM crops once the EU accepts them, a position that has vacillated for years, despite a green light by the EU food safety agency.

Genetically modified foods are commonplace in the US, China, Brazil, and Argentina – in processed foods, oils, and corn syrup. In US farming states, such as Minnesota last year, harvests of GM soybeans and GM corn made up 92 and 86 percent of those crops, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

By comparison, last year GM crops covered less than 1 percent of the farmland in France.

But views of genetic modification vary across Europe. *Eurobarometer*, a European Commission periodical, said in March that 58 percent of Europeans are opposed to the use of GM crops. But opinion in The Netherlands and Britain is less strident. Some Spanish farms are using engineered seeds. European farmers themselves (like those in Australia recently) are starting to say that tangible profits resulting from GM crops are changing their minds. A recent poll shows Italian farmers are willing to try them. Nor is the US uniformly on board. Wide swaths of land in Maine, Vermont, Oregon, and California are designated as GM-crop-free areas.

US officials and farmers alike express irritation over cases of food aid rejected in hungry African states – by local authorities worried about the contamination of crops by GM grains, making them unfit for sale in lucrative non-GM-food European markets.

South Africa is the only African nation that has approved planting a GM crop, though Burkina Faso may be close to approving a cotton strain, following its widespread use in India, and Egypt is looking at GM maize, according to the *Financial Times*.

At the summit in Rome, the FAO took no position on genetic modification or GMOs (genetically modified organisms). The organization takes a neutral position allowing choice by each nation. "Traditional farming techniques can close the yield gap between developing and developed nation farming, which is sometimes double," says FAO spokesman Ali Gurkan. "But new research into GM seeds that have no harmful impact on the environment and strengthen plants in drought areas – this could greatly help."

The GM dispute, complicated enough at a technical level, goes far deeper than food. It reveals profound clashes over science and culture, and over fundamental views about how to live in and organize the modern world, experts say.

"There's a deep divide over the role of technology in agriculture, and GMOs are the key," says an FAO official who was not officially cleared to speak. But he said that when GM



and non-GM crops are studied side by side, the GM crops have consistently cost less to produce and brought greater "effective" yields, "which is how much you get after the bugs have stopped chewing on them," he says.

For advocates, GM crops mean fewer harmful pesticides sprayed on crops, less fertilizer, greater harvest yields, and no ill-health effects. Biotech promises a future of drought resistant crops and cheaper, less vulnerable harvests.

For skeptics, mixing the genes of unlike species is a usurping of nature, the creation of Frankensteins in the food chain, and a concession to giant agribusiness. Genetic manipulation has unknown and untested effects on people and other living things, they argue, and can harm everything from soil and friendly insects to other crops. It also smacks of the blind faith in technology that brought global warming, poisonous rivers, and choking pollution. A UN report in 2005 found that "assessment mechanisms were faulty" in the testing of GMOs.

"GM foods have not lived up to the promises we heard about 10 years ago," says Helen Holder of Friends of the Earth in Brussels. "They have not alleviated poverty and hunger, and their environmental and health impacts are not understood. In Europe, we will pay more for safe food, and we reject GM."

In the US, China, and Brazil, there are now roughly two generations of genetically modified crops. The first generation, marketed for a decade, includes most of what is actually grown on mass scale. This includes corn, soy, rapeseed (for canola oil), and cotton. First-generation GM crops consist mostly of plants modified to produce internal toxins that deter the pests that threaten crops, experts say.

The second generation of crops – mostly developed since 2000, in a climate of rising

consumer safety fears – are more sophisticated. They involve modifications designed to increase nutrition, the protein, or vitamin content of crops. But few second-generation products have made it out of the lab.

While few scientists will absolutely guarantee the safety of genetic foods, they point out almost no side effects to human health. It is the effects on other plant species – that may be dominated and replaced in the natural world by GM crops – that concern some ecologists.

Most experts contacted favor a balanced, cautious approach. The British journalist and expert Martin Wolf, commenting in a recent *Financial Times* forum, commented that, "Obviously I am not in favour of 'careless embrace of GM technology.' Who could be?"

"But I am in favour of careful use of this technology, rather than careless rejection. Equally, I am not claiming that the only choice is between adoption of genetically modified crops and mass starvation...we should use whatever we have."

GMO and cross-breeding

Conventional plant breeding alters the genes of a plant or animal by selectively mating an organism with desirable characteristics using a species' natural reproductive processes. Farmers have used this technique for centuries.

Genetic engineering alters a plant's genes using techniques that directly insert new genetic material, which may come from another species, into a plant cell to create new or modified traits. Scientists first discovered the technique in 1973 and genetically modified food crops first became commercially available to farmers in the mid-1990s.

Source: Wire reports, Consumers Union.
– Compiled by Christine Chronopoulos

Robert Marquand is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor